

Communion Service - Friday 8th March

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Preacher: Rev Malcolm Maclean

[0 : 00] can turn back to the passage you read, Isaiah 35. And I'd like us to think briefly about verses 8 to 10.

And a highway shall be there, 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. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up in it. They shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, 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.

one of the most traumatic experiences in the history of Israel, or Judah for that matter, was when they were taken into exile in Babylon.

[1 : 32] In Babylon. Those who were in Babylon, in the exile, would have said to themselves, we know that God has predicted our recovery, but we can't see how he's going to do it.

we have lost everything. Our temple has been flattened.

Our royal rulers no longer exist. our land is inhabited by strangers.

Our world has disappeared. How can God restore it? What will it look like when he restores it? will it just be a recovery so that if we do go back, we'll just resume what we were doing before?

[3 : 03] If they had read Isaiah 35, they wouldn't have had to ask these questions. because their answer.

And the astonishing thing about Isaiah 35 is that the details were given a hundred years before the Babylonian exile occurred.

So though God had warned them that the exile was coming because of their sins, he also revealed to them that in the future there would be a very different world.

A world in which they could participate. I don't know what you thought when we read the chapter that they would be going back to a different land.

It's a land in which there's no wilderness. wilderness, a land in which there's no dry land. The desert has disappeared. Instead, it's full of flowers.

[4 : 25] In verse 7, the burning sand becomes a pool. There's no longer any drought. what an extraordinary world is being described.

But then also, the people are described. And in verses 5 to 7, or 5 and 6, sorry, we see there's no blind, nor is there any death, lame, neither are there any dumb.

It's not only a new land that's been created, there's a new people. And then, how are they going to get there?

They could recall the many miles that they had to walk from Zion to Babylon. Torturous journey. What's the journey back going to be like? What road are they going to walk on? Well, we're told about the road in verse 8.

[5 : 59] And it's a very different road from any other kind of road. It's a road that no one's ever seen the like of before.

No doubt there were major highways in the ancient world. But there never was a highway that stretched from Babylon to Zion.

And I suppose if somebody had read this chapter, they would have said that Nebuchadnezzar can build his hanging gardens.

But there's nobody around that can possibly build a road that will take us safely from Babylon to Zion and on the journey meet no wild animals, nothing dangerous on this road.

road. And furthermore, everybody on the road gets the destination. attention. It's probably the case that many who started the walk to Babylon didn't get there because the journey would be too much for them.

[7 : 43] But here's God saying through Isaiah that when this new kingdom comes, everybody gets the destination.

What's Isaiah speaking about? Is God saying to them have a small vision and just imagine you return to Palestine or is he saying to them have a bigger vision and think about a different journey and a different destination.

Think about going not just to an improved land but think about going to a perfect one. because the land described here is a perfect one.

It's almost like Eden except we can't get back to Eden. There's no roads going back the way. this highway goes to a better place than even what Eden was like. So I just want us to think about this road.

[9 : 27] And I want, first of all, a few comments about it. And then secondly, who are the travelers? travelers, what are they called?

And then a few thoughts about the destination. What's it like to get to the end of the journey? So the highway.

It's obviously not a literal highway. although it's not literal, it doesn't make it any less real. Now, we are familiar with streets that have names.

And their names tell us what goes on in the streets, doesn't it? If you met somebody saying they wanted to go to the Royal Mile, in Edinburgh, you could probably guess that they're either tourists or incident history.

All they'd have to say to you is that they want to walk on the Royal Mile. And right away you would tell what kind of people they were. Or if somebody said they were going to go to Oxford Street in London, immediately that would tell you that they're incident shopping.

[11 : 15] This highway's got a name. And the name tells you what kind of people travel on it. It's the Highway of Holiness. So those who go on this road, that's what their focus is.

That's what interests them as they make their way along the road. Nothing else but holiness. And of course, the word holiness is one of the terms that we often say, but sometimes we use it not to say what it is.

When we say, for example, that God is holy, holy, holy, what are we saying about him? Apart from the fact that three indicates a very great amount of it.

what is holiness? Often we describe holiness in negative terms. You don't do this.

You don't do that. But I don't think that's how the Bible describes holiness. Holiness is about elevation.

[12 : 55] When the seraphim sang holy, holy, holy to God, they weren't telling them not to do certain things.

They were actually celebrating the fact that he was greater than anything. Holiness points to something that's very high, elevated, better.

everywhere. So the people who walk on this highway, they're living an exalted life.

They live life on a higher plane. A life that's far more attractive than any other lifestyle that people see on other roads.

holiness, as we know, means separated, but it's not just separated from something, it's separated to something.

[14 : 08] We're separated from sinfulness and we're separated to God. A holy person is someone who's constantly in the presence of God.

So as they make their way along this road, the light of God shines on them. He's with all of them, every step of the way.

they're set apart to him. They're dedicated to him. They enjoy him. Being with God makes them happy.

In their souls, there's a new appreciation of reality. And they discover that God is the greatest beauty.

love each step on this new road. Because God is there with them.

[15 : 23] Of course we know they weren't always on the road. There came a time in the experience of each of them when they changed direction.

They had been on another road, going to another destination. And they may have been quite happy on that other road. And they may have imagined it was a good road.

But the only reason they thought that was because they hadn't yet tried the better road. how did they change roads?

And we know the answer to that question, don't we? They changed roads when they heard the gospel. In ways that perhaps they didn't fully appreciate initially.

they became dissatisfied with the road they were on. And in their hearts there came a longing for something different, for something better, for something that was above the mundane, for something that brought real satisfaction into their hearts.

[16:53] they heard about Jesus, the man who describes himself as a road, because he says in John chapter 14 that he is the way.

That means he's the road. And he's the truth and the life as well. We'll come back to that later on.

But whatever were the externals, accompanying the discovery they made of Jesus, they listened to his message of repentance and faith in him, and they did it.

They repented of their sins, and they trusted in Jesus. And when they did that, they moved to the other road.

at the moment of their conversion, they became holy. They became saints.

A saint is a holy person. The only people on this road are saints. they're saints because they've been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

[18:22] He has washed them clean. Their sins have all been forgiven. Past, present, and future.

They're now set apart by God to be his. saints. He takes special delight in them. And that's from the first second of their new life.

They go on discovering lots of things about themselves. That's true. But whatever they do find in their hearts, and it can be quite a discovery, but they don't cease to be saints.

You can't be a saint half of the days of the week. You're either a saint or you're not.

And all the people on this road, they're saints, cleansed by Jesus. And there's millions of them on the road, and all of them are set apart to God.

[19:38] an amazing company to be walking along the road with. And I walked along the Royal Mile yesterday, didn't know a single person on it.

I never said a word to anybody on it. But this road, well, strangely, while I was walking along the Royal Mile, I was also on this highway.

And sadly, while I didn't manage to speak to a human on the road, could speak to God. But anyway, on this highway of holiness, we're told that it's an easy road to understand.

There the end of verse 8. The stupidest person on this road will not go astray.

Isn't that incredible? Even if they're fools, that means uneducated. Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

[21:20] you don't have to have an IQ that's very high to walk along this road. Whenever we start taking driving lessons, we look at the highway code.

when I alluded to it, a long time ago now, but there was nothing hard in it.

You know that. There might have been things in it that I didn't want to do, like keeping to the speed limit.

But there's nothing hard in the highway code. It's all designed to make the road easy to drive on.

And this highway of holiness, the one who made it said the road was easy.

Jesus says it. He says, come to me, all you who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, and you shall find rest for your souls.

[22:54] And in that same set of verses he says, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. He's not saying there there's not going to be hard providences, promises.

But that's a different thing altogether. But the instructions for living on the road. Jesus says, his road is easy.

Sometimes we make it very complicated. And that's what normally happens when we add human rules. But Jesus himself, that's his assessment of his highway code.

And the apostle John tells us that his commands are not grievance. So it's a road that people can understand the rules.

There's a rule connected to this weekend, isn't there? If he has put us on the road, we're to remember him.

[24 : 30] That's straightforward, isn't it? Not only is the road straightforward, it's safe.

There in verse 9, there's no lying there. And nor is there any ravenous beasts come up on it. They shall not be found there. It all depends what we mean by safety, of course, doesn't it? What's the point of a road?

The point of a road is to get us to our destination. There's nothing going to come on this road that's going to stop any of the travellers getting to the destination.

There'll be plenty of noise beside the road. Lions may roar beside the road, but they're not on the road.

[25 : 54] No lion can jump onto the road to drag somebody off it and prevent them getting to their destination.

Sometimes the travellers find their journey shortened. But it doesn't stop on getting to their destination.

They do get there. And we might say when, say, martyrdom.

That was a dangerous experience. And no doubt, at lots of levels it is. But it doesn't stop anybody getting to their destination.

They get to their destination. And that's all the prophet is saying. Anybody that starts to walk on this road, there's no possible danger that can possibly prevent them getting to their destination.

[27 : 20] Of course, that's what Paul says in Romans chapter 8, isn't it? That there's nothing in the entire creation that can separate them from the love of God.

God. So even if we do go through circumstances of difficulty, they're not on the road.

They're beside the road, as it were, in this illustration. Because this road takes us to heaven. so it's a safe road, as far as the destination is concerned. One of the striking things of most of our roads, I don't know over here, but in Inverness, one of the most striking things about the roads is the number of potholes.

And also the seeming inability to do anything about them. A pothole just tells us that all the roads that we travel on literally need improvement.

[28 : 53] This road that Isaiah is talking about, it never needs any improvement. It's a perfect road.

Isaiah himself walked on it 3,000 years ago. It was a good road back then.

It's just the same today. God has made the road. And therefore, who can improve it?

God doesn't need to go and get some kind of course in order to provide a better road. It's there.

Perfect. Want to get to heaven? Heaven? This road takes us there. And as far as this highway is concerned, I think the image that's being given is that it's full of people.

[30 : 12] And here we are in 2019. we can look ahead and we see people traveling to Zion.

We can look back and we see people who have journeyed to Zion. There's always going to be travelers on this road.

And all over the world today there's millions of them all walking down this road.

Some of them will get to the destination quicker than others. But it's the same road. It's a good road.

And we should look around it. Because if we start looking at other roads, we just get discouraged.

[31 : 25] But the road to Zion, it's got people on it who are going to get to their destination. road.

That's the highway. I suppose it's appropriate for us to ask ourselves, are we on it?

and if not, why not? Why not? And then there's the travelers.

And here we can see in verses 9 and 10, they're called the redeemed and the ransomed of the Lord. I think it's important when we come to these kind of descriptions to say to ourselves, what would this have caused one of the original readers to think?

And an Israelite, whenever he or she would have thought of redemption, they would have always asked, who's the redeemer?

[32 : 57] But as far as I know, there's only one way of redemption in the Bible. And that was a redemption that's provided by a person called the kinsman redeemer.

When a family lost their property or perhaps had to go into slavery for debt or some reason like that, it was the responsibility of a relative to redeem them.

You can see that for example in the story of Ruth and Boaz. nobody else could redeem them but a relative. So when somebody read this passage here about redemption, they would automatically have asked, who is the relative that's going to redeem us?

Isaiah would maybe have said, read my whole book and you'll find out a lot about him.

Because Isaiah does tell us, doesn't he, how he would be born. he also tells us Isaiah 53, how he would redeem our relative Jesus.

[34 : 42] Hebrews chapter 2 says he's not ashamed to call us brothers. it's his responsibility to come and pay the price of redemption and not just pay the price of redemption but restore to us the inheritance that we had lost.

and every person on this road they've been redeemed by their brother and this road that he himself is is taking them to the inheritance that they lost.

He's going to ensure that they all get there. we mentioned earlier he's the way, the truth and the life. He's the road and because he's the truth he tells us how to walk in it and because he's a life we have the energy to walk in it.

But the point I want to stress is that this redeemer who qualifies us to have this marvelous name of the ransomed of the Lord he's not a stranger.

Not is he a distant God rather he is the Lord who became one of us.

[36 : 35] Who became a man who went to the cross who provided all that his redeemed will ever need.

And it's a beautiful title isn't it? we're the ransomed of the Lord. We're his possession and he is ours.

the Lord's supper that's where brothers meet.

Everybody at the Lord's supper is a brother or a sister including the one with whom we meet.

The one that we remember he's our brother. The one who came to redeem us from the slavery of sin.

[37 : 57] And he's going to take us thirdly and briefly to the the amazing destination. With any story we all like a happy ending don't we?

There's an extraordinary ending here. It looks as if in verse 10 it jumps to the end of the road and just as the last travelers come in the ransom of the Lord together they come to Zion with singing and it's good for us isn't it to try and imagine what a crescendo that will be when millions and millions and millions of voices enter Zion with sin no doubt when a Christian goes to heaven he or she is met with singing but that's not the idea here rather the idea here is that all of them sing together now that the journey is over for all of them and it's nice when to be just to think of that look forward to it when that day comes there will be everlasting joy upon our heads a crown of joy maybe is the idea here apparently when people were invited to a feast they used to put flowers on their heads and these flowers pointed to their happiness we're not going to have flowers we're going to have the real thing when the people went to the feast and they took out their flowers the one thing that couldn't be said about these flowers is everlasting if they lasted a few days that would be all but the feast that we're going to is everlasting joy it's never going to come to an end and in that we're like our elder brother what was he looking forward to as he came down here and as he went to the cross it was for the joy that was set before him there was something ahead of him that made him go through with everything and what made him go through with everything was the prospect of joy and part of that joy for

Jesus is that all the travelers get home so we can as it were participate in the same things that gave Jesus joy when we get to the heavenly city we're going to have the Holy Spirit in ways that we don't have now even in this world part of his fruit in our lives is joy but it's only a sample a forte of the degree that's going to occur when we get to the end of this road we shall obtain gladness and joy and at that same moment sorrow and sign shall flee away even on the road even on the perfect road the travelers experience things that give them sadness most of it comes from within themselves but the minute they cross into the city all of them together as it were sorrow and sighing flee away in heaven today heaven is a happy but those who live there haven't yet experienced the fullness of joy they still need the resurrection and they still need their entire family to be together but when that day comes nothing but joy forever as we gather at the

Lord's Supper we're to anticipate the marriage supper of the Lamb and look forward to the joy that's to come Samuel Rutherford once said that in this life we live in the suburbs of heaven a short distance away is the center of the city the Lord's Supper life it's like living in the suburbs of heaven because it's a heavenly activity and as we take part in it we're to say to ourselves we're not far from the center so when it comes to the

Lord's day the question that comes to all of us is if we are on the highway are we going to remember the Redeemer who paid the price to give us such a marvelous destination and if he has

put us on the highway then our responsibility as well as our happiness is to gather with his people and remember him and to do it knowing that there's better days to come so may God enable all of us who should do it to do it this weekend shall we pray

[46 : 18] Lord we give you thanks for all the ways you have helped us the way you created this incredible road a road that takes us to a perfect world a road full of amazing travelers whom you have given eyes to see and ears to hear and a tongue to speak giving them a joy in their hearts that they want to leap and ahead of them on this road however long it may be and it's not the same length for everyone ahead of us is the world of joy Lord help us to see that the highway of holiness is a very elevated route it offers to us things that no other road can give us and grant

Lord that we experience it and we do so in a special way this weekend so Lord remember all of us we pray for your own name's sake amen four we we we we we