

ESF Lord's day service sermon
9/23/2016

Turning a Desert into a Fertile Land

Text: Isaiah 35:1-10

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, ² 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.

³ *Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;*
⁴ *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."*

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

⁶ *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.*

⁷ *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.*

⁸ *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.*

⁹ *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, ¹⁰ 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.*

The desert is a place where there is no water, an essential source of life. The desert is a place where scorching heat burns dry sand all the time. No plants can survive in the desert. There are no roads in the desert. If anybody wanders in the desert, the person can be easily lost and die.

There are times when we live in a situation like the desert. There are times when we live in extremely harsh and difficult conditions. There are times when our hearts are dry and our lives are barren.

There are several things which enable us to overcome life in a desert. They are water, strength, and a road. We can rejoice not because there is no desert in our lives, but because we can have water, strength, and a safe road in our desert.

Today's word shows us how we can get these three things while our lives become like a desert.

Water for the thirsty (verses 1-2,7)

The prophet Isaiah prophesies that streams of water will revive our dry and thirsty lives: *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* (verses 1-2). He assures us that the burning sand in the desert will become a pool (verse 7) and flowers will bloom in the desert. These are images of revival of our lives which are dried up by all kinds of hard times.

How can this be possible? God makes this possible by fulfilling the promise through Jesus. In John 4:14, Jesus says: *Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* By the water, Jesus means the gifts of the Holy Spirit which quenches the thirst of our dried souls.

Drinking water is not cheap. Especially drinking water in a desert would be very expensive. But there is free drinking water. House and building owners in New York do not pay for the water provided from the city. Why? Because years ago, a wealthy man of New York paid a huge amount of money to the city for the water bills of all New Yorkers. But if there is any building owner in New York, who knows this and tries to pay for the cost of his water usage, how foolish would he be?

Years ago, a Scotchman was in Liverpool where he was to embark on his journey to America. He fingered the few coins that made up his entire earthly wealth, and decided that he would save as much as he could on food during the trip in order to have more money on hand when he reached New York. He went to a small store and bought a supply of crackers and cheese to get him through his days at sea. But as the voyage progressed the sea air made him very hungry. To make matters worse, the dampness in the air made his cheese hard and his crackers soft. He was becoming desperate with hunger. The last straw came when he caught the fragrant whiff of delicious food on a tray a steward was carrying to another passenger. The hungry man made up his mind that he would have one good, square meal, even though it might take several of his shillings. He awaited the return of the steward and asked him how much it would cost to go to the dining room and get a dinner. The steward asked the Scotchman if he had a ticket for the steamship passage. The man showed his ticket, and the steward told him that all meals were included in the price of the ticket. The poor man could have saved the money he spent on crackers and cheese and he could have gone to the dining room and eaten as much as he liked every mealtime.

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the price in full for the living water once and for all. We do not need to pay anything for the water. The payment for the water is included in the gospel of Jesus. In the word of Isaiah 55:1 God confirms this fact: *Come all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ... without money and without cost.* We don't need to strive to receive the water. Just by claiming it we can receive it at any time. He will bring streams of living water to the desert in our lives.

Strength for the weak (verses 3-6)

What would happen to us if we travel on foot in the desert for a long time? No matter how well we equipped ourselves with all kinds of things for the travel, we may become weak. Our lives are a long road filled with harsh conditions. Psalm 90: 10 says: *The length of our days is seventy years or eighty....yet, their span is but trouble and sorrow.* Nobody can be always healthy and strong in a life long journey. We all constantly need sources of strength and healing.

Why are there such harsh conditions in our lives? Because we are living in a world affected by sin. Our dry lives in the wilderness originated from sin and the curse.

Genesis 3:17-19 pronounces that the Earth, which was a paradise became a wilderness due to our sin. Man listened to Satan's deceptive lie and chose to rebel against God. The Bible calls it sin. Because of sin, the entire human race has fallen under God's judgment and curse. In sorrow and toil mankind eats the fruit of the soil. Thorns and thistles are brought forth. Hard labor and work - toil and sweat are the way man survives. Sorrow and sickness are the results of all this.

So Satan seemingly has won a death blow to the human race. He has brought a spiritual wilderness that we now live in, and he desires to keep mankind blinded, deceived and dumb.

But notice here in verse 4 what the prophet says, *...Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution, he will come to save you.* God promises that He will come to defeat the enemy, Satan and save man from the curse.

God made a way to save man from the devil's deception and the curse of the wilderness at the moment man sinned. He promised that He would provide a Redeemer. Genesis 3:15 tells of the prophecy of the Redeemer: he (the redeemer, Christ Jesus) would crush the head of

Satan, while Satan would strike Christ's heels at the cross of Calvary. Jesus exposed all the lies of Satan with truth. He claims: *"I am the truth"* (John 14:6). Jesus was tempted and hurt by Satan, but He overcame all temptations. By dying on the cross, Jesus got hurt, but through His resurrection, He crushed the head of Satan who enslaved man with the fear of death. He has redeemed us from all curses in this fallen world. He brings healing to us while we live in the wilderness: *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... (verses 5-6)*

Jesus says: *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners* (Mark 2:17). If we acknowledge that we are sinners and we need redemption from the curse of sin, and accept Jesus as our redeemer and healer, He always brings strength and healing to our lives. So we can rejoice not because we don't have troubles in the desert, but because we have the Redeemer who redeems us from our troubles.

Road for the lost (verse 7-10)

There are times when we feel lost in the wilderness. In troubled times we do not know what to do or where to go. Although we try everything we can, we cannot find any way to get out of the wilderness. Or while we are traveling a path we find, we just struggle with endless obstacles which leads us to nowhere. The Lord who provides, in the desert, living water for the thirsty and strength for the weak, also provides a road. The road is called a highway in the desert. Verse 8 says: *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.*

It is not one of many roads. It is the only road to lead us in the right direction in all circumstances. It is the only road to keep us from a sinful, destructive life. So it is called “the Way of Holiness.”

Do you know how much it costs to build a highway in the desert? It may cost far more than building highways in other places. To build a highway in the desert of all men’s lives, has an enormous price. Because this highway needs to pay for all the sins men committed in the past, commit in the present and will commit in the future. There is no way any man can pay the price. Someone else has to pay for it — and that’s what Jesus did: *“in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”* (Ephesians 1:8).

So, the "Highway in the desert" that Isaiah prophesied about was paved by God at a costly price- in order for it to span all man’s sin and to work through countless ages-to this present day. A Highway was made through the purchase price of Christ’s life. The price of the blood on the cross made that road.

Jesus claims that He is “**the Way**” (John 14:6). When we are lost in the desert and cannot find any way to get out of the desert, Jesus comes to us as the highway in the desert. The only thing we need to do to get on the road is to repent from our sins and accept Jesus as the way.

Some years ago, a Russian submarine was trapped by a strong fishing net which was 600 feet down under the sea. There was no way which the submarine could get out of the trap by itself. If anybody came out of the submarine to attempt to remove the net, he would immediately be crushed by the enormous weight of the sea water pressure. So the only way to save the people in the submarine was to have rescuers bring down special equipment and cut off the net. Russians do not have any

equipment to do such a rescue operation at that depth. Years ago, a similar accident happened in a submarine with more than 100 men in it. At that time, the Russians were afraid of asking for help from other nations because it would hurt their pride. So they tried to rescue them by themselves but failed. All the men in the submarine perished with the submarine. But this time, they swallowed their pride, and asked the US and England for help, as they had the rescue equipment and technicians.

Some people are still trying to find a road in the desert by themselves without Jesus. They refuse to acknowledge that man does not have a way to save themselves from the curse of sin. They refuse to turn their hearts to the Redeemer Christ and do not ask for help from Him because of their pride. The only result from this pride is endless wandering in the desert.

But if a person denounces pride and acknowledges that Jesus is the way, Jesus redeems that person. Jesus shows the way for that person.

If you are lost and wandering in a dry, barren life, humble yourself before Jesus and confess that you need the Redeemer. He will lead you to the *right* highway. Take His way and follow His way. Then you can always find the right way even if you are going through life as if it were a desert.