

I wonder what gets you out of bed in the morning? What is it that motivates you to get up and get going? Then when you are doing something and you are feeling a bit weary what is it that motivates you to keep going to get the job done? The question is about what motivates us not just to get up each day but motivates us through each day and especially at those times when life just isn't what we might want it to be.

As we have been going through Isaiah, we have been seeing that God was not pleased with his people and that he was acting in judgement on them, especially through the Assyrian armies.

However we also see in Isaiah that Assyria and all the other nations who oppose God would one day face God's judgement.

But where does this leave God's people?

At this point in the prophecy it leaves them in a difficult place because life was tough and if you glance to the next verse, 36:1, we see it is going to get a lot tougher as the Assyrians attack the cities of Judah and then camp against Jerusalem.

When things are that bad what motivates people and what motivates you when it seems as if the whole world is against you?

What we see in these verses is God's promise of hope to his people which was meant to motivate them in their current problems but also to motivate those who much later would be taken into exile in Babylon.

The hope expressed in these verses is put in very poetic language and uses imagery of desert and wilderness as an expression of the situation of God's people at that point and later. It describes God bringing life to the desert and above all God promises his people a return to Zion, that is Jerusalem, God's holy city.

The words were intended as reassurance to motivate people who were under attack but also as words of hope to those who later on would read these words while in exile.

1. The promise things will get better v1-2

Through Isaiah, God promises that things will get better for the people of God.

Isaiah here is speaking in terms reminiscent of the Exodus. He sees God's people as a pilgrim people coming through the wilderness experience and is looking towards a day when things will change for the better for them. He uses the image of a spontaneous transformation for his people, from death to life. The image used is of a desert springing to life in the way that after rain the desert might bloom with the small crocus like flower. In this way, to the barren desert, will be given a fertility and beauty such as was there in places like Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon. God's promise is that his people who have long known God's wrath will now see his glory and splendour as he acts to restore and bless his people.

A few weeks ago a small group of us began Christianity Explored and one of the first things we did was look at Mark 1:14&15, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said, "The Kingdom of God is near."

In other words the wilderness was beginning to blossom with the coming of the kingdom of God and of Jesus the king.

I wonder how you view the world and your part in it? The world has many attractions. It should have because God made it. However, attractive as the world is, it is not as God intended and more it is now a world at odds with God and therefore a world opposed to the people of God. While there might be many spiritualities and philosophies on offer, the world is a desert a wilderness, a barren place. It is a place where God's people struggle and suffer.

However while that may be so we have this promise of God that things will get better. More we see the spread of the kingdom of God bringing life like the crocus bursting into bloom and as we see such signs it is a reminder that life will not always be like this. There will come a day when the whole world "will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God." This promise was meant to be a reassurance to the faithful people then and to God's faithful people today.

2. The reassurance strengthens God's people v3-4

As Isaiah spoke God's people were struggling. The fear of Assyria was real and the hardships they were facing were severe. God spoke to encourage them, to help them to be strong, and at the heart of his words of reassurance was the promise "your God will come....he will come to save you" (v4). Now that salvation would be initially from the Assyrian troops and in Chapters 36-37 we see how Jerusalem and her people were saved. Later it would be the hope of rescue from captivity in Babylon. The hope of rescue was meant to encourage them in the trials that they were facing. It was also the sign that God had not forgotten his people despite their sin and rebellion.

For us as we read the words "your God will come....he will come to save you" it may be that we already know we are followers of Jesus and have as it were been saved but until we enter heaven our salvation is not complete. So we need the reassurance that God will save us.

So if you are finding living for Jesus Christ tough at the moment, perhaps at work you are finding yourself the odd one out as a Christian. Or it may be that at home your family don't understand your Christian commitment. Then the promise of the day when all will see the glory of God is meant to encourage you and to stiffen the sinews as you continue to battle on.

We need to understand this because being a follower of Christ can at times seem like a tough and even a lonely thing. The world can seem hard a bit like living in a desert and we need the reassurance and encouragement of God through his word and through meeting with his people to help us keep going.

This is why Sunday is so important and meeting with God's people is key because it is like an oasis in the desert and seeing the happy smiling faces of others who are walking the way of Christ is like seeing the crocus blooming and a reminder of better things ahead.

God gives us his promise of better things ahead and the promise is there for their and our reassurance and to put a strong hope into our hearts.

3. God's salvation brings change v5-7

As we move on to vs 5-7 we see the effects of God's rescue on his people. When God saved them things would be very different. There will be transformation and there will be abundant life – the water will gush forth. Then instead of sorrow there will be joy. Things will be very different God is saying from how they are now and the implication is to stay faithful, to steady the wobbly knees or the quaking heart, and to continue as God's faithful people.

God's rescue would turn sorrow into joy.

When the followers of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked if he was the Messiah his reply was, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk...” (Matt 11:4-5)

In other words the rescue was happening already in Jesus. In him things were changing, the desert was beginning to bloom again and living water was gushing forth.

Jesus was pointing out that with his coming and the coming of the kingdom change was happening and that change was the sign of the kingdom and of God at work.

The fundamental point here is that when God is at work among his people he changes lives and turns them around. For these people faced with strong forces around them and feeling hemmed in God was saying I will save you and radically change you.

That is what God still does through Jesus. He opens our eyes to see. That was the experience of John Newton on that slave ship as it battled back across the Atlantic towards Britain and which is spoken of in his hymn, “I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see”.

He certainly found his mute tongue or rather his blaspheming tongue was changed and given a song of joy as we know through his many hymns.

God's promise to his embattled people was that he would come to save and this was meant to give them reassurance and hope of transformation.

4. God will make a way to himself v8-10

God's salvation of his people would mean that his desire, which we looked at in Chap 1 to restore his people to himself would come about and in these verses God is promising to provide a way through the wilderness so that that might be achieved.

The way will be called the way of holiness and, as holiness is a supreme characteristic of God in Isaiah, perhaps what was being said here is that God would provide a way back to himself.

Who would walk that way? Well not the 'unclean', v8, which refers to those who have not performed the proper sacrifices, those who are ritually unclean. No only "the redeemed of the Lord will walk there" (v9).

The way would v10 bring God's people back to Zion, to God's place and that would result in sadness being replaced by great joy and gladness.

What is being said here is that God is promising to his people that he will restore them to himself and they will once more be his people in his place under his blessing.

God's promise is that he will provide a way back to himself. Later in Isaiah we will read of the Servant who will play a large part in this, "And now the Lord says— he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself." (Isa 49:5). This we see would be achieved through the sacrifice of the servant "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5).

As we turn in to the New Testament we see how God was faithful to his promise and how Jesus fulfilled the role of the servant. In John 14:6 he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me". He was saying that he is the highway back to God. He is the only way back to God. This has been achieved as Isaiah said it would through the suffering servant and that that is Jesus for through him the Father has opened "a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body" (Heb 10:20).

God has fulfilled his promise in that through the death of Jesus he has opened to all a new way into his presence.

Who is that way for? Well Isaiah makes it clear "only the redeemed will walk there" (35:9) and that "the unclean will not journey on it" (35:8).

In other words we enter onto the highway by accepting what God the Father has done for us in Jesus. If we refuse to accept that sacrifice on our behalf then we remain outside the grace of God and not in his way.

Later on in our All Age Worship we will give this thought a visual aspect as we think of the way as having a starting point and we will have people coming through a cross shaped starting point to signify that walking on the highway of holiness begins by accepting what Jesus has done for us on the cross. There is a highway. There is a way to God and to heaven but my question is are we on it? Have we accepted God's rescue? He promised it and it has happened in Jesus but have we accepted it?

If we have I hope we have noted from Isaiah that to walk the way of holiness is in no way dull and boring. In the past being a Christian was often seen as dull. You saw church groups dressed very formally and with unsmiling faces but the picture here is very different isn't it?

“They will enter Zion singing” (v10). I know we have X factor and Britain’s got talent and lots of people think they can sing but by and large people don’t sing. OK you may do at football or rugby matches or the last night of the proms but mostly people don’t sing. What we are seeing here though is that God’s people are a singing people because of the joy that is theirs. They joy of knowing God’s rescue, of knowing they are safe on the highway to God and knowing the goal that is theirs of being with God. For the Christian it is joy now, even in the tough times of life and “everlasting joy will crown their heads” in eternity.

This is the vision and promise God sets before us as an encouragement for us as we wake each morning and as we face tough times in our lives.

What gets you out of bed in the morning? I hope that after today you might be able to say it is the promise of all that God has for me both now in terms of his life giving transforming power and the hope of being with him in eternity and sharing his joy.

The king’s promise – the joy of salvation.