

Scripture Text

Isaiah 34-35

Context

Having covered the themes of salvation and judgement for God's people in 28-33 we now see the expansion of these two themes over the whole earth. God's judgment will be utterly unavoidable for all on earth, but following this will be God's salvation for those who trust in him.

Observation and Meaning

- What causes this scene of international and universal destruction? (34:1-7)
- What is the connection between Zion and the desolate world? (34:8-10)
- How do verses 34:11-17 help to bring home the enormity of God's judgment to those who might make light of it?
- What are the contrasts in 35:1-4 with chapter 34 and why have they happened?
- What is the substance of God's promises in 35:5-7 and how should they stimulate trust and obedience? How are they fulfilled in the new testament?
- What are some of the ingredients of this pilgrim lifestyle and what guarantees are provided to underline it's value.

Big Idea

This world has two paths, one leading to everlasting destruction and the other to everlasting life. The path we enter onto now determines which destination we will arrive at.

Connecting to the Bible's storyline

Sin's natural outworking is death. In this passage we see God's personal commitment to the vindication of his name and his glory amongst people, eradicating sin fully and finally. God will himself come (35:4) to do this work and sweep those who have faith in him into his coming Kingdom.

Sermon Outline

1. God, not this world, is the One to fear (34:1-17)
 - What we learn about God and His judgment?
 - What kind of people come under this judgment?
 - What is the result of this judgment?
 - Is this fair?
2. God, not this world, is the one to hope in (35:1-10)
 - The encouragement of hope (v1-4)
 - The healing of this world (v5-7)
 - The joy filled way of the righteous (v8-10)

Application

- How does the stark choice presented to you in this chapter (between judgement and salvation) affect your daily life?
- How does the reality of these chapters help you to appreciate Christ who became a sacrifice for us, undergoing God's judgment in order that we might be spared?
- Why do you think it's necessary to encourage some (35:3-4) on this pilgrim journey as we walk on the highway of holiness towards Zion?
- How do these chapters reassure us in the midst of suffering and evil in the world?
- How do the repeated references to joy and singing encourage you to press on the highway of holiness?

Guide for Study Leaders

Use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text.

Context

Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.

Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation & Meaning

Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. "for", "if", "therefore"), repetition, dialogue, narrative, OT quotations, etc.

To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author's purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?

Helpful questions to ask include:

Who is writing and to whom?

What is the situation of the author and of the readers?

Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?

Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application

Apply God's word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviour by asking good "heart" questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?

Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?

Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.