

Sermon Reading: Isaiah 35:4-7a

Sermon Theme: He is coming to save you; to bless you

So much of life seems to depend on one's perspective. For instance, a team winning the championship is a tremendous event...for the winning team. The team that made it to the final game, laid it out on the line, had to fight and scrape to get there only to come up short feels quite differently. Yes, 2nd place is a great accomplishment; and, yes, it is better than 3rd place. But it's still disappointing when you didn't win. Or, take the phrase, "He's coming." How one interprets a phrase like this is going to be different depending on perspective. For the child who is doing something they aren't supposed to, hearing, "He's coming," can bring a feeling of panic as they quickly try to cover up their tracks. For someone who needs help when in trouble, hearing, "He's coming," may bring great relief. As sinner-saints who live in this world, we need help and reminders with our perspective. It can be easy to see the troubles in our lives the way rest of the world sees them and neglect to see what God's Word teaches us. It can almost seem like we are walking with our heads down only able to see a few steps ahead of us—a few days or months at most down the road of life—and then have a hard time keeping in mind the end goal. God, through his Word, shifts our perspective today to be comforted and have confidence that he is coming to save and bless us.

For the people of Israel and Judah, there would have been plenty that they probably should have been fearful of and anxious about when Isaiah first recorded these words. For their blatant disregard for the Lord and open idolatry, the Lord would bring judgment on these people as he warned would happen. And not too much further in the future it did happen. The Assyrians would come and take into exile the northern tribes of Israel and they would never come home. Sometime later the Babylonians would come, destroy the Temple and Jerusalem, and cart the people of Judah off to live in exile. We can't begin to imagine how terrifying and violated that would make one feel being ripped from your home and forced to live somewhere else.

Obviously this feeling of fear and anxiousness doesn't stop with them. Today, God's people, Christians, have plenty they may feel anxious about. No, maybe these things aren't as crazy as an invading army, but it still can leave someone filled with the fear. There might be a feeling of anxiety when looking at the expenses that are due or coming up and not knowing how far the money is going to spread. There might be some fear when thinking about your health—will it get better, or are things going to get worse. Maybe it comes when looking at your

loved one when you know there is little to nothing that you can do to help. There's anxiety for how the weather is going to turn out and how the prices are going to be at year end. There's fear whether or not the kids are going to have good friends, do well in school, not get picked on or made fun of. There's the fear and anxiety that comes wondering whether or not you made the right decision for yourself and for your family. There is so much that tries to rob us of that peace and confidence we have with God. What is it for you that gives you that feeling of being on edge?

When we are afraid or have this anxiety, you may try and put on the strong face for others to see. But deep down you might feel vulnerable, weak, almost shaky or even paralyzed with the fear that can leave you questioning and unsure of what to do or where to turn. But, how can you be strong when you feel weak against so many expectations? How can you not be afraid when you don't have the answers that people are looking for? How can you feel strong when you are failing at resisting that pet sin and weakened with that feeling of shame? How can you not be afraid when the devil comes accusing and reminding the sins of your past?

But still it's to his people, to those with fearful, anxious hearts the Lord says, "**Be strong, do not fear.**" This isn't to cheapen the difficulties and fears in your life. But see what you are facing from God's perspective revealed I Many times in the Bible this, "Do not fear," is a marker that God's gospel promise that is about to be shared. And that's what we have here. Do not fear, the good news that the Lord wants you to be confident of and to give you strength: your God will come. He has not abandoned you to those fears, anxious thoughts, and feelings. He has not forgotten about you or your life. He is coming. And when he does, "**He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come.**" Nothing has escaped his notice. Harm and evil will be repaid. Why? Unlike sinful humans who sinfully seek revenge because they think it's going to make them feel better, your perfect Lord comes to save you. This is his ultimate will and desire: for all—you—to be saved. Your God is just, he defends his people, and in the end he has their back. And while we wait for his coming again he saves you from that which shackles us with fear. There is nothing to be afraid of because our greatest enemy the devil has already been defeated when Jesus crushed his head on the cross. Our anxious hearts can be at rest because Jesus already has given us the victory over death with his rising from the grave. The feeling of shame and the struggle with sin does not shackle for Jesus has set us free. Do not be afraid, Jesus was already punished so that you have peace with God. Because this has already been done, this changes

our perspective. The strength and confidence doesn't come from me or you. It's from and found in the one who has already come and saved you.

We have this confidence because we see what Jesus did in the Gospel reading from Mark. This man was deaf and nearly-mute and Jesus gives him hearing and the ability to speak. What would have that been like to all of sudden hear, to speak? We can only imagine the praises that man sang, the shouts of joy from his lips. We have other examples in the Bible with Jesus of how the blind received sight, the paralyzed and lame were commanded to get up and immediately were able to walk home, and the deaf were given hearing. With the miracles he did Jesus demonstrated and proved how he was the one to come, foretold of from old, from ancient times. This includes this prophecy in Isaiah which pointed ahead to Jesus who does all things well including care for physical needs!

And still, what we see and from our perspective things can be skewed. When one looks at the world around us it does not always seem that God is doing things well with the seemingly constant bad news and sad, horrible things happening to seemingly innocent good people. We see the trouble in our lives, the lives of loved ones and friends. You see the struggle and know the struggle of trying to live a god-fearing life fulfilling your role in a world that does not support what God's says. You feel the tension and strain even in our closest relationships.

What we don't often see or feel is that these troubles are often rich blessings from God. But instead of seeing life from this world's perspective, look at what God is doing for you. These troubles are blessings because they can lead us to despair of ourselves and our own capabilities and drive us to him. The Lord may be using those troubles to open our eyes to see we are leaning on, depending on, trusting in the wrong thing. And so he leads us to his Word that gives us eyes that see the truth that he has all things under his control. He may use those troubles we hear about, feel in in our lives, see in the lives ourselves and loved ones to lead us to his Word that gives us ears that hear the truth of his power and hear the promise that he is doing all things well for you. He uses the blessings in our lives—the healing when we are sick, the caring of those in the hospital, the renewal of health and strength, providing for body and life—to remind us of how he cares about our physical welfare.

He uses these physical blessings ultimately to lift our eyes away from the few steps ahead of us and up to the cross of Jesus. We were blinded with sin, lost on our own, unable and unwilling to follow God's commandments. So blind were we that

we were convinced that we could do something to save ourselves leading us farther away from God. But Jesus is the light who gives sight to the blind; not just the physically blind but us who were spiritually blind. He has opened our eyes to see that our salvation is found no one else. On that cross the sinless Jesus did all things well, including living and dying for you so that debt your sin owed was paid in full by him. By his Word he has opened our ears to hear and works in our hearts to believe that our sins are forgiven. He gives clarity through his Word to see that the troubles we have here do not even compare to the glories that he has won and reserved for us in heaven.

Having seen what he has done, having heard of his grace we want to leap like deer to follow the Lord's will. We want to shout for joy for we who were lost have been found, we who were blind now see God's love and mercy in his Word and in our lives in sometimes the most unlikely of places. Live with confident joy for God's mercy overflows like gushing water providing, protecting, and preserving you physically and spiritually. Do not be afraid but rest your confidence him. This confidence isn't based on your physical well-being, your reputation or social status, how successful you are, what you have accomplished or will accomplish. It comes from God who does all things well for you coming to save you and continues to bless you. Now we look forward to his coming again when all will be changed, in a flash, in the blink of an eye. At that time this prophesy will be fulfilled entirely when he returns on Judgment Day to deliver us from this veil of tears and then we shall see clearly of what we only see as a shadow right now. Amen.