

December 4, 2022

KIBC Sunday Worship Service (the Second Advent)

Messenger: Pastor Teiichiro Kuroda

Title of the Message: “Joy and Gladness Will Overtake You”

—The Wilderness and the Desert Blossom—

Text: Isaiah 35:1-10

35:1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus,

35:2 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.

35:3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;

35:4 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.□

35:5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

35:6 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.

35:7 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.

35:8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.

35:9 No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there,

35:10 and those the Lord has rescued 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.

Introduction

1. Today is the second Sunday of Advent. As Christmas is coming soon, we give thanks for the birth of Jesus Christ. The theme of today’s message is “Joy and Gladness Will Overtake You.”
2. I am quoting Isaiah, Chapter 35 for today’s text. This chapter records

the prophecy of God's will, events which would eventually take place in Israel around 8 B.C.

- As you already know, the Israelites were loved and chosen by God. However, their future was prophesied that they would be destroyed by an enemy and taken to Babylon. And even though they became "captives" (slaves), the Israelites would still be the Israelites and they had "the light of hope".
- Isaiah prophesied as below—

35:1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus,

35:2 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.

⇒ Two important things are hidden in the verses above.

- ① The Restoration of the Israelites ② The coming of the new heaven and the new earth.

- The Bible says that the desert and the wilderness of Israel "will blossom like the crocus (saffron)". It is impossible for the wilderness and the desert to produce such blossoms. The crocuses (saffron) were already used for perfume and dye in Europe in the days before Christ. Its pistils were used as a spice and herbal medicine. They have a characteristic smell and take on a brilliant yellow color in the water. They are precious things because of their scarcity. The cost of only 1g is about 5 US dollars even today.
- It is said that saffron yellow was prized in ancient Greece and only the royal families were allowed to use it.

This is the "saffron (crocus)" which God said would "blossom like crocus (saffron)" in the wilderness and the desert.

⇒ This is real gladness and joy, isn't it?

- "The desert and the wilderness blossom" ⇒

What does it mean? It is the very prophesy that Israel will be restored. Let's look the geographic location of Israel. Lebanon, the north part, Carmel, the middle part and Sharon, the Mediterranean Sea area are fertile lands of good harvest today. Those lands were wildernesses and the deserts in the past. However, they are changing. The Bible records

they will become beautiful and rich lands. Moreover, God prophesied that Israel would see them.

- This prophesy was partly fulfilled on May 14, 1948 with the foundation of the State of Israel. At the time, Palestine was a deserted wilderness which had only 50 millimeters of annual precipitation. However, the Diaspora Jews came back to live in the Negev Desert, the southern part of Palestine. There are kibbutzes (collective farms in Israel) and they irrigated the desert and tamed the wilderness and grew crops. Today, the Negev Desert is called the Negev Plain and is full of greenery and flowers. People came to settle down there and built cities.
- David Bengrion, the first Prim Minister of Israel said, **“The future of Israel is dependent on how much wilderness we can exploit.”**
“The desert and the wilderness blossom.”
The Bible says ⇒ Rejoice! They will see the glory of the Lord!
- * Isaiah, Chapter 35 teaches us two important things.

Main Points

1. God's encouragement and His promise

- Through the Spirit of God, Isaiah the prophet spoke a message of encouragement to the Israelites.
35:3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;
35:4 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.
- God spoke to the Israelites. The Words above were given to the Diaspora Jews who had lost their country. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman Army and fell to ruin in 70 A.D. The Israelites left their land and dispersed over the world. They experienced dismay, helplessness, persecution, discrimination, disappointment and so on. It meant that Israel had become weak among the international community.
- However, God gave them encouragement. The Bible prophesied, **“He will come to save you.”** He told them to trust in the Lord their God, **“Be strong, do not fear.”** This speaks to the relationship between God and the Israelites. God kept encouraging them, **“Be strong, do not fear.”**
- My friends, this Word of God gives encouragement to people of all ages.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews spoke to the saints who were being persecuted because of their faith:

12:12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

12:13 Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

- This is the God of the Bible. We sometimes experience hardships and are completely overwhelmed, like the Israelites. However, if we have faith in God, He will keep His promises.
- Now, I would like to tell you something important. We need faith to receive the Words of God's encouragement. We also need faith to receive the Words of prophecy. If we don't have faith, we can't receive God's encouragement. God guides those who believe and gives encouragement to them.

2) God gives the promise of restoration.

- God had promised heavenly blessings to the Israelites and told the people that they will see visible change. This is the restoration of Israel.

The Bible, the New Interconfessional Translation

35:5 Then will the eyes of the men who can not see be opened and the ears of the men who can not hear unstopped.

35:6 Then will the men who can not walk leap like a deer, and the men who can not speak shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

- Isaiah, Chapter 29 records as below —

29:17 In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?

29:18 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

29:19 Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

- These prophecies speak about the restoration of Israel and the blessings for the wilderness again. When Jesus Christ came to this world 2000 years ago, joy and gladness came with Him. The birth of Jesus was a foretaste of the joy that was brought to Israel.
- **35:7 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.

The verse above is also the prophecy of Israel's restoration.

- It records that the men who can not walk will leap like a deer. It also records that in the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. Jackals range from 65 to 106cm in length and their tails are about 20 to 40 cm. They look like a wolf, but they have bigger ears than wolves. Their fur is light gold or brownish yellow but is black on their back and tail. They live together in packs and forage for food at night. They also hunt rats and hares. They are clever at digging a hole in the ground and breed 4~9 pups. The Bible says that grass and reeds and papyrus will grow in the haunts where jackals once lay.
- Water will spring there and rivers will flow. ⇒ Water is very precious in the wilderness. Isaiah, Chapter 41

41:18 I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs.

Israel will be restored. ⇒ This is the promise of the Bible.

- The fulfillment of these prophecies affects the authenticity of the Bible. As we see the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies, it causes us to open our hearts to the truth that God speaks to us.
- Do you know the sign that is appearing at the Dead Sea (the Salt Sea)? They can see it from **En Gedi to En Eglaim** near Jericho. (See the pictures.)

• **Ezekiel, Chapter 47:9-12**

47:9 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.

47:10 People will fish along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea.

47:11 But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.

47:12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their

leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.

- When God intervenes, the wilderness and the desert become covered with God's glory. There is restoration and hope. God gave this promise as a word of encouragement to the Israelites around 800 B.C. Let's receive this fact with the eyes of faith. God prepares great blessings for those who believe in Him.

2. The blessed way that God prepares

35:8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those (the redeemed) who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.

- When the glory of God is revealed, the world is transformed. The spiritual order is established. Here are two important points.

1) The redeemed

- God redeems the Israelites. The term "redeem" in Verse 8 is "gaal" in the original language. It means ⇒ "to buy back by paying gold (a price) If someone couldn't repay a debt, then they had to pay with shed blood. (Deuteronomy 19:12) It has strong meaning.

- Let's open **Exodus**—

6:6 "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with and outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgments.'

The term "redeem" here is also gaal.

- The term "rescue" appears in Verse 10.

35:10 and those the Lord has rescued 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 term "rescue" is "padah" in the original language. It means to free a slave who is burdened with debts.
- The Japanese Bible translates these terms "redeem" and "rescue" into the same word "aganau (redeem)".

God saves the lost ① by shedding His blood, not by paying money. And also, He ② sets free those who are enslaved by an enemy.

Isaiah the prophet praised God's works beautifully in Chapter 35. His praise is rising up to heavens.

- When we understand the deep meaning of the term “redeem,” we too will give thanks to God. God sent His only one Son into this world. God Himself shed His blood to achieve a complete redemption. Through this wonderful work of Jesus Christ, God has prepared “the Way of Holiness” for “those who are redeemed.”

Revelation

21:27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

- * Only those who were redeemed (by the blood of Jesus) and only those whose names are written in the Lamb's “book of life” can enter the city in heaven.

2) They will enter Zion singing with joy.

35:10 and those the Lord has rescued 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.

- Those who were redeemed by the Lord will “enter Zion with singing and with everlasting joy”.

By the way, Isaiah prophesied about the Son of God who would come to this world.

7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.

“Immanuel (God with us.)

- This prophesy about the birth of the Son of God, is the meaning of Christmas. 800 years after this prophecy of God, Jesus Christ was born. It really happened. The Son, who was called Immanuel, was born. He is the real Lamb of God. And,
- Those who were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb became “the redeemed” before God. And they walk on “the Way of Holiness”. And, they enter the city in heaven “singing with joy”. Hallelujah!

{Example} “The Impressive Diaspora Jews”

- The Jews established the State of Israel in Palestine on May 14, 1945, as the Bible prophesied. Since then, the Diaspora Jews began to come back to the land of their forefathers. Then, on November 9, 1989 ⇒ The Berlin Wall fell down. World history changed on that day.
- More than a million Jews from Soviet and East Europe returned to Israel. This is the chart of demographic change of Israel. (See separate paper.) I saw the Diaspora Jews kissing the ground after arriving at the airports in Tel Aviv and Haifa. It was the impressive scene!
- My friends, this is a real historical fact, and we should understand it is one of the events in God’s master plan. The relation between God and the Israelites is “the model” of our relationship with God. In this world, many Jews returned to Zion (Jerusalem) with joyous singing and dancing, but we too are heading for our heavenly Zion. This is the privilege of those who “are redeemed” by the blood of the Lamb. The day we enter the new heaven, the earth will be filled with special joy and gladness.
- Therefore, we can strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees. We are always weak in our daily life and can hardly stand straight. Even though we are like this, God’s promise for the redeemed is “true and Amen”.
- Christmas is right around the corner. The birth of Jesus Christ is coming. He is the Lamb of God and the Savior of all human beings. He redeemed us. Let’s welcome Him with joy and thanksgiving.

Conclusion

Title of the Message: “Joy and Gladness Will Overtake You”

—The Wilderness and the Desert Blossom—

- God gave His message to the Israelites through Isaiah even though they were unfaithful. This was only by the grace of God. Isaiah, Chapter 35 tells of God’s promise of blessing.
- Today, we have our second Advent Worship. God gave His encouragement and promise to those who trust in Him. His promise is the way of blessing to Jerusalem in heaven. Then, what about the people who will

enter the Promised Land?

- 1 . They are “the redeemed” by the blood of the Son on God.
- 2 . They will be taken by joy.

* God bless you!