



Series: Advent A Season of Worship
Date: December 11, 2022
Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor
Text: Isaiah 35
Title: The Ransomed and Redeemed Will Return

CMO

Good morning! This past week we opened our Christmas Missions Offering. This is our annual offering where the Mercy family gives together towards the advancement of the gospel here in Charlotte and around the world. 100% of this offering goes directly to our partners, none of it stays here. I love how simple and powerful this is each year as a step of following Jesus. It allows Courtney and I to simply and clearly disciple our family to say our best gift is going to God's mission and we are giving it together with our Mercy Family. We want to give \$125k together to this effort. In addition to our church planting partners nationally and internationally, there are 3 organizations we are intending to support locally through this offering that you can see in your advent booklet - One of those

is Freedom within Walls. All 3 represent the tip of the spear when it comes to bringing the love of God to children in need in our community. James Scott is a pastor in West Charlotte who runs Freedom within Walls. They've been around since 2009 this year they are serving healthy meals & snacks to over 5,000 kids in our area who are in need. He told me just Friday

Thank you so much for choosing to partner with Freedom Within Walls organization. We are honored and extremely excited about this partnership. Through our collective effort, we will be able to feed more children in Charlotte meals when food insecurity is prevalent. Working to eradicate childhood hunger also assists with positioning underserved children to become better scholars. With partnerships from community members like you, we will continue to execute wraparound services to equip disenfranchised community members with tools that can help them break through barriers and achieve freedom!

-GRATEFULLY HIS IN CHRIST, THE FWW FAMILY



I love that we can join these kinds of partners in their efforts to bring the love of Christ so tangibly to our city. So anyways, I hope you will join us in giving to the CMO.

ISAIAH INTRO

Today we continue our advent series. We are in the OT book of Isaiah. What I think makes Isaiah's message to Israel so powerful is the contrasting tones in the book. He gets really gloomy about their impending destruction coming BECAUSE of their sin and rejection of God. BUT then he powerfully talks about the HOPE God offers these same sinners. The hope is in the form of a savior God is going to send for his people. And today in chapter 35 he's going to give his people two names that have gripped me all week. The Ransomed & Redeemed.

See Isaiah 35 tells us our story. We are story driven creatures and Isaiah tells us ours in a powerful way. It is a beautiful passage that picks up on what we saw in the second half of Isaiah 11 from last week. And the hope it offers...oh man its incredible. BUT...it is for a specific group of people. Isaiah is going to talk about the Road to Zion, God's holy city. This is how Isaiah speaks of heaven, of the setting for God's people to spend all eternity with God. And he talks about who will walk the road home to Zion.

...the redeemed will walk on it,
10 and the ransomed of the Lord will return

The Ransomed and Redeemed. I can think of no more powerful and compelling name for the people of God than this. These two words tell the story of God's people. And so today

is really simple. Hopefully filled to the brim and overflowing with encouragement for you. My goal in This sermon is to show you your story as Isaiah is telling it. In 3 simple parts. Your Ransomed & Redeemed Identity, Your glorious Eternity, And your present assignment. Or more simply put - Who you are, where you are going, and what to do until you get there. What could be more important for us to get clear on? Identity, future, and purpose.

I mean those are the sacred 3 things most people want to know. Identity, future, & purpose. If we can get a good handle on those this morning, I'd say that's a good Sunday!

Let's start with identity. I'll put that passage back up here.

...the redeemed will walk on it,
10 and the ransomed of the Lord will return

Our Identity in Christ: Ransomed and Redeemed

These are not two different groups. In this passage and throughout the bible these two terms are used to describe the same people. There is a powerful story in these two terms. The people of God who are won back to God through his savior son Jesus Christ... And the people who are returning to God's dwelling place to spend glorious eternity with him are people who have been ransomed and redeemed. They are used interchangeably for the most part though there is a nuance to them. Ransomed is bought back and redeemed has a connotation of made whole.

In Christ you are ransomed - That is the label for someone who has gone through a rather violent experience. You



belonged to God your father. But you were taken. A more accurate statement is you and I betrayed God. We ran away and, in our sin, we served ourselves instead of God. Little did we know that the price of that sin is death and eternity apart from God. We were as Ephesians 2.1 says 'dead in our trespasses and sins.' Even though we are here and alive, because of our sin we are positionally dead. Separated forever from God behind the bars of the gates of hell. And in that position, we were helpless. Unable to save ourselves. This is the thing about someone who is ransomed. They are in a situation where they are unable to be set free from their evil captors. They cannot rescue themselves. And the captor DEMANDS payment or the one captured will be put to death.

There is a reason this passage and the rest of scripture gives us the identity of RANSOMED. And tells us to live OUT OF our identity as ransomed or purchased people.

20 for you were bought at a price. So, glorify God with your body. -- 1 Corinthians 6:20 (CSB)

Our ransomed reality - that it COST GOD something to rescue us from our self-inflicted condemnation - is to motivate how we live. We the dead were ransomed by God. HOW? Who paid the price?

2 He himself is the atonement sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world. -- 1 John 2:2 (CSB)

16 For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. -- John 3:16 (CSB)

The hope of eternity that Isaiah 35 is going to overflow with - it wasn't FREE. YOU don't just get heaven because you lived on earth. It's not the automatic next step. Justice had to be carried out for your sin.

And in the great LOVE of God for you...he sent his son to pay, to atone for, to be a ransom payment for you. To REDEEM YOU. So, when we celebrate Christmas, we look down into the manger we don't just see a child. I SEE MY RANSOM PAYMENT. I stand there doomed unless God sends a sinless savior who can die in my place. And THAT leads me to fall on my knees in humility. I don't deserve this. It's not fair, the child doesn't deserve this either. But God says it is this way. He is my ransom payment. And when I believe, his spirit comes into my life, and I experience the redeeming power of my freedom. If I will trust him and follow his word, by the power of his spirit I will begin to experience the wholeness of the soul that a redeemed son experiences.

So, my question is are you approaching Christmas as Ransomed and Redeemed? That the wage of your sin is death but the GIFT - that's what Christmas is - a gift - the free gift OF GOD is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Identity is such an important word in our age right now. What or who you "identify" as is a conversation that hasn't been a part of our society before the last 10 years. And for the most part the world around us, those who don't know Christ, are



simply grasping for meaning. As ole Michael W. Smith would say they are “Trying to find their place in the world.” And that isn’t new. And listen I think this is a wonderful opportunity for Christians to help people get to know the hope of Jesus. Because there is great humility in saying I identify as a sinner who is Ransomed and Redeemed by Jesus.

See Much of the identity conversation is based around feelings & desires. What I feel or desire is the authority that determines who I am. Well, the problem with this is feelings and desires are unreliable authorities. They are very intense at one time and then cold the next. And if I AM my desires then I will forever be a small boat tossed about by the unpredictable winds of my desires. And into that the Christian can say yes, I have desires and feelings. They go all over the place. I’ve found something more certain to be the authority of my identity. Something for sinners like you and me. I’m ransomed and redeemed by Jesus. And I’ve found real joy in that.

Ransomed and redeemed. THAT is who I am. That’s what tells my story. My past present and future. And the promise for the ransomed and redeemed is a glorious future. That’s the hope I’m standing on. It’s the hope the Christian faith is built on. That ONE DAY - we ransomed and redeemed sinners will be with God in heaven.

See all of us have hope in something. Even atheists themselves have hope in something. The way I heard it put this week was that Christians believe in the miracle of the virgin birth, while atheists believe in the miracle of the virgin universe. So, pick your miracle. Mine comes with the promise

of heaven. And I want to tell you about it. This is part two of our sermon.

Where we are going - Heaven is our glorious eternity.

And really Isaiah is painting a picture here. Not to give you 3 tips for your best eternity now. No, he paints a picture to fill your heart up with hope of the day to come. So just listen to the picture unfold.

1 The wilderness and the dry land will be glad.

the desert will rejoice and blossom like a wildflower.

2 It will blossom abundantly and will also rejoice with joy and singing.

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.

What Isaiah is saying here is that nature will be made whole. The wilderness and dry land - that’s the way of describing earth here and now. The desert. And this is life apart from God. a desert. And into that wasteland the Lord speaks a hope of an eternal spring. In fact, this imagery picks up in the second half of verse 6 and into verse 7.

for water will gush in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

7 the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty land, springs.

In the haunt of jackals, in their lairs, there will be grass, reeds, and papyrus.



There is no way to fully do this justice, so you have to, in a sense, picture it. God renews nature. The dry and desolate land where jackals prey will become an oasis. The desert will be filled with life. Scripture actually has a good bit to say about God renewing nature as a part of heaven and I think, because we manage to live indoors so much, we kind of mitigate how awful nature can be. And I got no problem with that. My family went to get a Christmas tree and I got the boys to help me get it in the house and one of them got sap on their hands & complained about it. And I'm like the one time a year we bring nature inside we complain about it attacking us. But the reality is nature is brutal. A desert...you get caught in the middle of a desert and you are dead. In fact, just to ensure good research I looked up that MW Smith song last night and ya'll I couldn't believe it. The Music Video - 1990 which was gloriously bad - was him playing the piano IN A DESERT. And then its cutaway shots to a girl in the same mom jeans some of ya'll are wearing now like walking barefoot in the desert contemplating her life. And I'm like...NO. SHE WOULD BE DEAD. And a hyena would be feasting on that MW Smith's nasty mullet. Cause I don't know where your place is, but it isn't alone in a desert.

But what God says is there is a day coming where the wilderness that if we just spent a few days in it, we'd be eaten alive by it...where that wilderness will instead be the canvas on which we see the glory of the Lord. Listen I love the outdoors but there is NOTHING like what is coming for us. The desert will be lush landscape and the dangerous places will be replaced by tranquil dens.

And that is meant to encourage you and I now as we walk through the wilderness of this life. That this is NOT forever. See JOY pervades Isaiah 35. Because the redemption creation will experience is something that God will also do to us. Look at verse 5.

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

6 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy,

Look at who we are - blind, deaf, lame, and mute. And then look at what God gives us. Sight, sound, agility, and a joyful song. Wow! The ransomed and redeemed are made whole. And again, you have to appreciate how powerful this scene is. Do you guys know who Joni Eareckson Tada is? She was paralyzed at 17 years old in a car accident. She has since survived cancer twice. She founded Joni & Friends disability center as a Christ centered ministry to help others with disabilities & to train churches how to do the same and she said in an interview in 2019 "first thing" she'll do in Heaven with her new, glorified body is drop to her knees and offer a sacrifice of "paralyzed praise" to Jesus for His faithfulness to her while on earth."

The world of the ransomed and redeemed will be made whole. The bodies of the ransomed and redeemed will be made whole. This is awesome. Do you realize if you are in here and you are in the medical profession you are going to be like me in heaven - UNEMPLOYED!



So here at Christmas we praise God who has created an eternity - heaven - where we will experience a redeemed nature, redeemed bodies, and what verses 8-10 point to - redeemed souls. Listen to this

8 A road will be there and a way; it will be called the Holy Way. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for the one who walks the path. Fools will not wander on it.
9 There will be no lion there, and no vicious beast will go up on it. they will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk on it,
10 and the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with singing, crowned with unending joy. Joy and gladness will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee.

Jesus calls himself John 14.6 - The way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through him. He's picking up on Isaiah's language in saying that. And in heaven there will be a Holy Way - the ones walking on it are the ones made holy by the Holy One! It's our path to Zion!

1 Peter 5.8 calls Satan a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. But that lion will be gone. No vicious beast on this path. No on this elevated path - Makes me think of the High Line in NYC. if you've ever been there, it's a walkway that sits above the city streets a few stories and it's got greenery & flowers and it's really pretty. And it's about as close as you can get to this that I've seen. And yet it falls so far short of this.

On this path the ransomed and redeemed are going to sing with unending joy. In fact, you will be overtaken by joy and gladness. Sorrow and sighing will flee. Friends. We have no shortage of sorrow and sighing in this life, right? We all carry stuff with us. Sighing is the body's expression of disappointment. That's been a lot of my body posture over the past few weeks dealing with loss. But for real its everyone who has lost anyone. THAT WILL FLEE. That feeling of sorrow...it will be gone because the wrongs will be made right. All that will be there will be full hearts. Talked about this last week I can't wait for this day.

Ya'll knows that Christmas song "please come home for Christmas?" It was playing as I was writing this section and it concludes that if you come home for Christmas "There will be no more sorrow, no grief and pain, and I'll be happy once again." Beautiful timeless classic...COMPLETELY WRONG. If you come home for Christmas...you are bringing your problems with you. And it will be good for a bit but eventually sorrow & sighing will come.

My hope is when we, the ransomed and redeemed, return to ZION! THEN there will be no more sorrow, no grief and pain. And THEN I'll be joyful forever more.

That's our picture of where we are going. Who are we: ransomed and redeemed. Where are we going: Heaven - glorious eternity. So, what's left for us is what we are to do until we get there:



3 Strengthen the weak hands,
steady the shaking knees!

4 Say to the those with anxious hearts:

“Be strong; do not fear!

Here is your God; vengeance is coming.

God’s retribution is coming; he will save you.”

What we are to do until we get there: Courageously walk
ahead, together.

Strengthen the weak hands & steady the shaking knees. This is a call to courage in the midst of a battle. Where fear can reign large. I know fear all too well. It is a familiar foe to me. I’ve battled it my whole life, so I say none of this lightly. I think because I’m acquainted with tragedy and sickness and death and loss and conflict and sin...I can let fear take over and worst-case scenario myself into insanity.

In light of YOUR IDENTITY - RANSOMED AND REDEEMED.
And in light of Where you are going: GLORIOUS ETERNITY
IN HEAVEN secured for you in Christ.

The call simply put for those who are in Christ: Be strong and do not fear! And then he says - SAY THAT TO OTHERS WITH ANXIOUS HEARTS. In other words - en-courage each other!

And this is a big point because of the temptation to fear that is all around us and could easily seep into the church. Fear is the outworking of insecurity. Like because I don’t know how things are going to turn out...my response is fear. I’m uncertain and

therefore insecure. And Isaiah is saying...BE STRONG. DO NOT FEAR. Here is your GOD

Just like Joshua said to Israel

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Just like Elisha said to his servant when they were surrounded by an army

“Don’t be afraid, for those who are with us outnumber those who are with them.” 2 Kings 6:16

And the psalmist says

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23.4

The Lord is my light and salvation...WHOM shall, I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?
Psalm 27.1

“The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Psalm 118.6

and the angels out on the hillside say to the shepherds

“Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people -- Luke 2:10



And Jesus says in Matthew 10 that he's sending out his disciples to spread the good news of the gospel and they will be arrested for it & be called into court.

19 But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, 20 because it isn't you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you. -- Matthew 10:19-20

And Paul says to young pastor Timothy in danger of feeling underqualified for the assignment placed on him -

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. -- 2 Timothy 1:7 (CSB).

And Paul says to the Philippian church - The Ransomed and Redeemed in Philippi

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is nearby. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. -- Philipians 4:4-7

DO NOT FEAR. Hebrews 12 uses Isaiah's words to say RUN WITH ENDURANCE the race before you. Strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees and fixing your eyes on Jesus...RUN. GET UP off the mat and walk.

Brothers and sisters as your pastor I'm going to call you to Obey Jesus even when its hard or uncomfortable or the world is against you. To take steps in following Jesus. I'm going to

try and stoke the fire of faith in your heart and I'm going to tell you to strengthen your tired hands & weakened knees. This life has a way of tiring us. But in God's strength, not in your own strength but in his strength it's time to GET UP.

The Christian life empowered by God - Paul says it this way 7 Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; 9 we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. -- 2 Corinthians 4:7-9

I'm trying to give you a lot of texts here to say life is hard, you are gonna get knocked down. But in the power of the SPIRIT OF GOD you can stand back up AND WALK! Not in pride or in ego or even in your own strength. But instead, you walk in the strength of the one who ransomed and redeemed you. And you fix your eyes on the eternal glory that awaits you. And you take the next step. Humbly but courageously. You take the next step. You take a step of patience with your child. AGAIN. You choose to forgive your roommate AGAIN. You choose not to give up on your SPOUSE even though they let you down AGAIN. You choose God's love for the hurting. You choose God's love for all ethnic groups. You choose hope in your sadness. You step out and open your home to your neighbor and build a friendship in hopes they can hear the gospel one day.

Ya'll WE MUST NOT WALK IN FEAR. But in the perfect love of God that casts out fear. Because we have a mission and a limited time on this earth to carry it out. You are not promised tomorrow. That shouldn't make us afraid, because while I'm



not promised tomorrow, I AM PROMISED ETERNITY. That is my story. Ransomed and redeemed. Secured by Christ headed towards a glorious eternity. Jesus saved me, the spirit is with me, and heaven awaits me. THAT is my story in Christ.

And our world is filled with people searching for their story. And this can be their story too.

The Jewish people have a tradition at the end of their Passover Seder to recite the phrase

L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim - it means next year in Jerusalem. It is a statement of hope that next year may be the year God will rebuild Jerusalem and return it to them. Today we are taking communion. Our sacred meal that Christ gave us to take until he comes back for us, and we dine together at what Revelation 19.9 calls the marriage feast of the lamb. So, as you take this meal today, let's take it as the ransomed and redeemed who are confidently, hopefully awaiting that day when we will eat around the table with church and our savior. And say to one another "Maybe next time in heaven."

PRAY

