

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual
Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

November 13, 2022

Day 1: Isaiah 35:1-2

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

When the Messiah comes the whole earth will benefit. The presence of God's Kingdom has a positive affect on both humans and the rest of creation. It is as if creation knows who brought it into being and it responds when the creator is near. The glory and majesty of God is seen in beauty. Think of the beauty of something gentle growing in a harsh land. It is beautiful on its own but made more noticeable because of the environment it is in. We are to be the glory of God; we are to be something beautiful grown in harsh land.

Question: Is it possible to make something sacred by praying over it for a long time?

Challenge: Look up what "Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon" refer to.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11

Day 2: Isaiah 35:3-4

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'

Both hands and knees (hands for work and knees for praying) will be needed for the return from exile to take place. The return is permanent so that one must take all that they need for their new home. It will take strong hands to walk and carry all that is needed for the return. In order to get a person to prepare to get up and return they will first need to change their fearful heart to one of hope and courage. God is coming to save us and is willing to have us come back but we need to follow.

Question: Is it possible to see God in the baby Jesus?

Challenge: If you can see God in the baby, how do you see Him? If not, why not?

Day 3: Isaiah 35:5-6a

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

The belief was that wherever God dwelt there was health and well being. To be in the presence of God was not just a warm, personal feeling but a real physical well being. They were healthier in the land God had given them, following God's Law. One could only follow God's Law perfectly in the land God gave you. The return from exile meant that they were forgiven by God for past sins (the sins of the nation) and because of that forgiveness, life now is healthier. Isaiah is claiming that even if life was good in exile (you were living well and had a good job), still it was better in the long run to give it all up and return to Jerusalem. Israel was to be the light of the world and they could not fulfill that mission if they were not in land God gave them.

Question: How does one's physical health improve if one is closer to God?

Challenge: What would you have to give up to be closer to God?

Scripture: Isaiah 44:1-8

Day 4: Isaiah 35: 6b-7

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty round springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

When the people of God come back to the land then the environment will improve. Where the land does not produce it will now produce in abundance. In Genesis 1:26-28, God created humans to be stewards of the environment. We are to care for God's creation. Unfortunately we can kill it as well as care for it (this ability is the result of sin). However, God did not create us to bring death, but life. Isaiah is stating that the people by their return and by keeping God's Law can improve the land.

Question: Why would God want people to care for creation?

Challenge: How can we people make objects in nature very important or sacred?

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-13

Day 5: Isaiah 35:8-9

And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

In God's Kingdom not only is a person healthier and the land productive, but it is also safer. The three things a person needed to live well were: Health - Food - Safety. Safety was and is important because we cannot concentrate on the land and what it can produce if we are worried about our safety. Isaiah believed that if the people ignored God's forgiveness by not returning to Jerusalem, they could not fulfill their mission nor find abundant life. If we today ignore God's offer of forgiveness and keep ignoring God we will remain in exile and not experience the Kingdom that God has opened to all ages, nations & races.

Question: What does the verse mean by *unclean*?

Challenge: What would it be like if our county did not have to worry about safety?

Scripture: Isaiah 62:1-12

Day 6: Isaiah 35:10

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The response by the ransomed, those who accepted God's forgiveness, is singing. When we allow the love of God to wash over us we end up singing. The singing comes not in an attempt to deny the world around us, but comes because we know that God has been to the future and come back to tell us it is OK, and then lead us to that future. God in Jesus tells us to be not afraid because in His Father's house are many rooms and one just for us who believe and follow.

Question: Have you allowed the love of God to wash over you?

Challenge: If the response to experiencing the love of God is singing, what song would you sing?

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-7