



Last Sunday was the third Sunday in Advent and our third look at 'Learning to wait' in Isaiah. Our theme was restoration and we began by thinking about how the world might end; but also about how we as humans try to rebel against this idea and prevent it. On the big screen we can watch countless disaster movies and see how humanity overcomes the greatest of enemies, but in real life people do suffer from the fallen creation as natural disasters ruin livelihoods and diseases or disability restrict people's freedom and dash dreams. What is the answer to death and destruction if we as humans can never defeat it? Isaiah 35 gives the answer it is the return of God in Jesus and the restoration of all things.

Restoration and renewal of the land

Isaiah 34 speaks of death and destruction as we hear of God's judgement upon the world for its sin, but chapter 35 begins with beautiful images of life and fruitfulness. The new creation will be splendid and magnificent but verse 2 tells us this only happens when God comes and he will be the greatest sight.

Restoration and resurrection of the body

Verses 5 & 6 describe the change within humans as the blind see and the lame leap. As we add these promises to New Testament revelation we see Jesus healing people in this way throughout his ministry however we see something greater when Jesus, himself, rises from the dead. Jesus is the firstfruits of all those who hope in the resurrection.

Restoration and redemption of God's people

Finally Isaiah describes a highway which leads into the city of God, Zion. This way is only for the redeemed; those whom God has rescued, which is ultimately through the cross of Christ. This way is clear and straight, free from evil and death and it leads straight into the presence of God, where there will be joy unspeakable and gladness without end as sorrow and sighing are no more. The way to this city of course is through Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Some questions for further study and to create discussion and application ...

Do you believe the world is going to end? What ways do people say the world might end? Do they take it seriously? Do you take the fact that the world will end with the return of Christ seriously? Do you think about it?

Read the story of Hezekiah and Sennacherib for some context, either in Isaiah 36-37 or 2 Kings 18:17-19:37. What was the threat? What was the temptation for the king? How did he respond to God's promises? What happened to Assyria?

In what ways have humans brought further destruction to an already fallen creation? How have people noticed this and what are they trying to do to solve it? What do you think the Bible teaches about how we should care for creation? How does knowing that we can never fix our planet and the hope of a new creation affect how we live in it now? Read Romans 8:18-25 and encourage one another

What can sometimes be the attitude people have towards God when faced with physical or mental suffering? What are the hopes spoken of in verses 5-6? Do Jesus' healings in the gospels encourage you to look forward to this hope? How do these change how you view suffering now? What hope is there of the resurrection? Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 and encourage one another

Why is humanity's broken relationship with God our greatest problem? What do verses 8-9 tell us about the solution to that broken relationship? What has Jesus done to bring restoration? What do we learn won't be in the new creation? How does the description of Zion in verse 10 excite you? Read Revelation 21:1-7 and encourage one another