

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 13: The Lord Will Reign; the Ransomed Return -- Isaiah 33:1–35:10

Picture a city under siege. The enemy has camped outside the walls so long that the people inside have stopped counting the days. The roads are empty because no traveler dares use them. The fields lie unworked. Treaties have been torn up, and the man who promised peace has broken his word. The strongest soldiers weep in the street, and the bravest cannot stop trembling. That is the world Isaiah paints at the opening of chapter 33, and into that fear he drops one of Scripture's most hope-filled sequences. The same God who lets the destroyer do his worst is about to rise up, and when He rises, everything changes.

These three chapters move like a great piece of music. Chapter 33 begins in dread and ends with the people gazing on a king in his beauty, dwelling in a Jerusalem that no enemy fleet can reach. Chapter 34 turns dark and heavy, the wrath of God poured out on the nations and on Edom in particular, the books of judgment opened and read aloud. And then chapter 35, after all that smoke and blood, opens like sunrise over a desert. The wilderness blooms. The blind see. The lame leap. A clean highway runs straight through the wasteland, and on it the ransomed of the Lord come home singing, with everlasting joy on their heads.

We need to hear these chapters the way Isaiah meant them, not as a forecast of an earthly political kingdom someday restored to a particular nation, but as the promise that the Lord Himself would reign, and that He would gather a redeemed people to Himself. When Jesus came opening blind eyes and unstopping deaf ears and making the lame walk, He was not improvising. He was fulfilling Isaiah 35. When He told John's disciples to report what they saw and heard, He was quoting this very chapter. The Way of Holiness Isaiah saw is the road we walk now in Christ, and the everlasting joy is the inheritance kept for the redeemed in glory.

So this lesson asks us to stand in the same two places Isaiah's first readers stood. We stand inside the besieged city, tempted to despair, and we hear God say He will rise. And we stand at the edge of the blooming desert, looking down the highway home, and we ask whether we are on it. The king in His beauty is no distant figure. He reigns now. And the question that runs underneath all of chapter 35 is simple and searching: are you among the ransomed who walk the holy way?

Group Discussion: Read Isaiah 33:14–16 aloud. The people ask, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire?" and Isaiah answers by describing a certain kind of life. As a group, what does his answer tell us about who actually lives in the presence of a holy God, and why does that matter for us?

Personal Reflection: Isaiah 35:8 says the redeemed walk a highway called the Way of Holiness, and "the unclean shall not pass over it." Where in your own daily walk are you tempted to step off that road, and what would it look like this week to stay on it?

Read Isaiah 33:1–35:10

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 33:2 the people pray, "O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for You." What does it tell us about the proper posture of God's people in a time of trouble that their first move is to wait on the Lord rather than to scheme or surrender?
2. Isaiah 33:5-6 says the Lord "will be the stability of your times." In what specific area of your life right now do you most need to learn that real stability comes from the fear of the Lord and not from your circumstances?
3. In Isaiah 33:14-16 the trembling sinners ask who can dwell with devouring fire, and the answer describes one who walks righteously, speaks uprightly, and refuses bribes and bloodshed. How does this passage correct the idea that we can stand before a holy God without any change in how we live?
4. Isaiah 33:15 lists very practical marks of the person who dwells with God, including honest speech and clean hands. Which one of those marks is God pressing on your conscience most clearly today?
5. Isaiah 33:17 promises, "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty," and 33:22 declares, "the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king." How do these verses point us to the reign of Christ, who rules now at God's right hand, rather than to a merely earthly throne?

6. Chapter 34 describes the Lord's settled anger against the nations and against Edom. When you read such a heavy chapter of judgment, what does it stir in you, and how do you hold the wrath of God together with His mercy without softening either one?
7. Isaiah 34:16 tells the reader to "seek and read from the book of the LORD," insisting that not one of God's words will fail. Why is it significant that in the middle of a chapter about judgment, God anchors everything to the certainty of His written word?
8. Isaiah 35:1-2 says the wilderness will be glad and the desert will blossom and "see the glory of the LORD." Where in your own life has God taken something dry and barren and begun to make it bloom, and have you stopped to give Him the glory for it?
9. Isaiah 35:5-6 promises that the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, and the lame will leap, and 35:8-10 describes a clean highway called the Way of Holiness on which the ransomed of the Lord return with everlasting joy. Matthew 11:5 shows Jesus doing exactly these works. How does this teach us that the kingdom Isaiah saw is fulfilled in Christ, the gospel age, and the eternal home of the redeemed, rather than in a future earthly kingdom restored to a single nation?
10. Isaiah 35:10 says the ransomed return with "everlasting joy upon their heads," and sorrow and sighing flee away. Name one concrete way the Lord Jesus is shaping you this week to walk the Way of Holiness as one of His ransomed, so that your joy is anchored in Him and not in what you can lose.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 11:2–6, Jesus tells John’s disciples what they see and hear, deliberately echoing Isaiah 35:5–6; Hebrews 12:22–29, coming to the unshakable kingdom and the consuming fire, parallel to who can dwell with devouring fire in Isaiah 33:14; Revelation 21:1–4 and 21:27, everlasting joy with no more sorrow and nothing unclean entering, the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:8–10; Obadiah 1–15, the fuller oracle against Edom that stands behind Isaiah 34; Romans 11:22, the kindness and severity of God held together, the same tension Isaiah holds across chapters 34 and 35.

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