

In 1633 to put forward the idea that the earth revolved around the sun was a theory that could get you killed. Everyone knew that the sun revolved around the earth. Look up on a sunny day. Read your Bible and find out the earth is God's creation. It made sense. But Galileo questioned that model. And in 1633 he was sentenced to life in prison for even thinking it much less publishing his faulty ideas. Today it is observable fact that the earth is not the center of the universe and that indeed everything is rotating around the sun. Seems things were not as they first appeared.

If everything was subject to simply what it looked like we would all come to the same conclusions about this world. Yesterday is was another suicide in the news. Today it could be a serious car crash. Tomorrow it could be mass panic on the markets because of the unknown actions of the government. The day after that the news will undoubtedly be about something else, probably worse. We hear about so much crime, corruption, and carnage that we have to reach the conclusion this world is getting worse and no one especially God seems to care that much. But are things as they appear?

The Lord used the prophet Isaiah to record in the first lesson a wonderful section that gives us some insight into the future. In the section right before this Isaiah had mentioned God's vengeance and how no one would be able to escape. We add to this the fact that this world is getting worse not better and we think we know what's coming. We must have judgment to be afraid of. But...

**Things are not as they appear
Enemies of God will be defeated
Children of God will be saved**

Rejoice! Be delighted! Would you use those words to describe your reaction if someone took you into the desert? The harsh environment of the desert doesn't seem to be anything to get excited about. The thorns and bramble in the wilderness make life hard to come by. Would you rejoice if you were blind or couldn't walk? Losing those abilities isn't something we wish for. Blindness and paralysis add challenges to people's lives. These serve well as pictures of hardship, pictures of judgment. Yet Isaiah says, **"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."** Miracles like this can only mean one thing, God is active. Whatever God is bringing about is not natural.

What's natural for us is to focus on our hardships. Like the harsh desert wind the temptations of the world surround us threatening to dry us out from any relationship with God. Where can you go to escape the pressures of sexual temptation? How can you protect yourself against the constant attacks of greed? And facing such steady temptation to sin we become barren. We look beat up and distressed. Just like the wilderness and the desert only can produce their natural vegetation so too we produce our natural fruit. Its sin and God must judge us for it.

Isaiah is painting a picture of change, really saying that things are not as they appear. The dry desert, the unlivable wilderness, the blind and deaf, these are pictures of God's enemies. Yet they are not as they appear. The people of Isaiah's day were already looking forward to a Messiah. His coming means the end of God's enemies. Christ's first coming was for us who gave in to the pressures of sexual temptation and the attacks of greed. Christ changes our natural sinful desert into a blooming beautiful oasis. God dresses us with the beauty of forgiveness. He clothes us in the richest love and splendor that only he can give.

The desert is described by Isaiah as **"Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs."** In the place where nothing good existed God worked his grace. We receive the benefits of refreshing water. We receive the water of life. This makes us alive to be sons and daughters of God. Our old enemies have been defeated so we're free. We're no longer held under the burden of sin. We gush forth the water of life to other people. We blossom in the Word and show the beauty of God to others. They see it by how we live and move around in the world.

In the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood, the girl goes in to see someone dressed up just like her grandmother. In reality it's the enemy, the wolf. Little Red Riding Hood is in danger and she doesn't even know it because things are not as they appear. We too are in danger. The enemy is around us and threatens us daily. But things are not as they appear. The enemy doesn't have control over us. God does. In his Word he gives us the ability to identify and avoid the enemy. Because things are not as they appear Isaiah also pictures the fact that the children of God will be saved.

Footprints don't last long in the desert. Blowing sand quickly erases any history of people walking there. Trying to establish walking paths or roads through the desert is a constant battle. As helpless as that situation quickly could become Isaiah shows that God is in control in this desert. **"And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness."** Compare how Wilshire Blvd is cared for with the Kilpatrick Turnpike. That's the difference between a path and a highway through this desert. The highway provides protection and stability. It's called the Way of Holiness only because certain people walk there. They're the ones God redeemed. These blood bought people walk free from worry or care on the holy highway that leads to heaven.

You and I know that there are plenty of things that endanger us as we walk today. Plenty of reasons to get up on that highway. But how? How can we become part of the redeemed of God? Can we push our way on by pointing to our worthiness or good works? Are we automatically on because of our membership at this church? Are we even walking there at all? Things are not as they appear. We aren't automatic walkers and we don't walk there because of membership. **"Only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing."** You're redeemed by Jesus. You have been declared not guilty of your sins in the blood of the Savior. So you walk this highway. On the outside you don't look different. But as a redeemed child of God you've been delivered by Christ from every one of your sins. God displays his splendor in your lives, the glory of the Lord.

We hear Isaiah say, **"Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come to save you."** Jesus has come and now we are God's children walking on the highway that leads back home to Zion, God's holy city. Whatever caused our stress and sorrow before has fled. This path leading to life gives us no reason for worry or fear. Our consciences are not burdened with sin anymore. We live at peace. We are confident that the Lord works things out for our good. We joyfully go on rejoicing and thanking God for the blood of Christ which redeemed us. We are not as we would appear.

You've probably all looked across a parking lot in the summertime and seen the heat rising off the pavement. At just the right angle in the distance it will look like a pool of water. But if you go over for a drink you'll know things aren't as they appear. The same mirage in the desert can leave you thirsty and grasping for life. Trying to live comfortable and confident without Christ leaves us more than thirsty for water. We'll be grasping for life. With Christ having come once and promising to come again we have the one who defeated our enemies working for us. We have Jesus who made us children of God and promises to return to save us. We might look tired, worn down, and weary. But we're walking the highway that leads home. Things are not as they would appear.