

Bible Study
December 9, 2019

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 35: 1-6A, 10

Matthew 11: 2-11

James 5: 7-10

1. Isaiah 35: 1-6A, 10

- The themes of Chapter 35 are very similar to those of the Second Isaiah in Chapters 40-55: blossoming of the wilderness; sight to the blind; a highway in the wilderness; and the return of the redeemed/ransomed
- Chapters 34-35 form a unit which looks forward to the redemption of Israel.
- The desert will bloom. The desert where Israel's arch-enemy, Edom, once was will now be transformed, irrigated, and verdant.
- Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon were very fertile and beautiful forests of mighty trees and lush greenery.
- Feeble hands and weak knees will be strengthened and made firm.
- The fearful will be made strong.
- Here is God! He comes to save you!
- The blind shall see, the deaf shall hear, the lame will leap, and the mute will speak. Restoration and healing with God's appearance.
- V. 10: the return of the exiles. Sorrow and mourning flee; joy and gladness meet them.

2. Matthew 11: 2-11

- John's imprisonment is reported in 4: 12. The reason for his imprisonment and death is narrated in 14: 1-12. He is put in prison because he challenged Herod about his marrying Herodias, the wife of his brother.
- John's question could be related to his surprise that Jesus is not more of fire and brimstone, judgement and punishment. Jesus is as much about healing people as he is about instructing and admonishing them. The Sermon of the Mount made mercy and compassion the supreme criterion.
- Jesus responds by framing his works (narrated in chapters 8-9) in light of the prophecies of Isaiah which described God's appearance as marked by healing and consolation. In effect, Jesus says: I may not be fulfilling your expectations of what a Messiah should be. But, I am fulfilling what the prophets said the Messiah would do. Blessed are you if this does not scandalize you—trip you up—you are blessed because it already shows that grace is in your heart getting you ready to receive the surprising good news of God's mercy and love.
- Jesus hopes that John will not be scandalized by him—that he not be a stumbling block—because it is not what he was expecting.
- Jesus follows his mild rebuke of John with praise of him and signals his importance in salvation history. John's attractiveness is not that he was

indecisive and wishy-washy or that he was rich and lived in a palace; it was because he was a prophet.

- They believed that prophecy in Israel had ended in the Old Testament with the prophet Malachi. The people were eager for a true prophet who would speak the Word of God to them. That is why the crowds went out into the desert to hear John.
- The quote is a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23: 20. It is re-worked so that as God speaks, it is not that he will prepare a way before me but before you—Jesus.
- John is so great because he is the one to whom it is entrusted to proclaim the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. He is the pre-cursor of the Messiah.
- But, the effects of the Kingdom (the effect of grace and mercy of Jesus' death and resurrection) is so great that one who is reborn into the Kingdom by grace is even greater than John the Baptist.

3. James 5: 7-10

- James counsels the people to have patience with the difficulties of this life and their expectation of the coming of the Lord.
- The farmer is an example of patience as he waits for it to grow and be nurtured by the rains.
- Make your hearts firm because the Lord is near.
- Do not complain about each so that you will not be judged. (Point one finger and three are pointing back at you.) And the judge is at the gates, at the door!
- The prophets are an example of those who underwent hardships with patience.
- Perseverance is to be desired. Perseverance takes patience. Holding out until the Lord comes.
- Job is the prime example of patience and perseverance.
- To persevere with patience is to be ready to receive the compassion and mercy of the Lord.