

Sometimes I'm asked by people what I do for a job. I'm ashamed to say that I cringe a little bit before coming out with it. "I'm a missionary." I cringe because I know from experience how most people will react. They just sort of nod and are reduced to stunned silence. It's a conversation killer. And I think that's because for most Aussies a missionary is someone from the 19th century getting around in a pith helmet. Something irrelevant to modern life. Something that belongs in a museum. And my boys will heartily agree that I am pretty much ready for the museum.

Today we're going to see that God's mission to undo the devastating consequences of sin in the world is anything

but irrelevant. It's a mission that is cosmic in its scope. It's a mission that will renew the whole of Creation. And it's a mission that has the Cross of Jesus at its centre.

We're going to be looking at Isaiah 35. But before we get there it will be helpful to have a quick overview of the context - where Isaiah has been going up to this point.

The first 39 chs of Isaiah are mostly about judgement.

Judgement on the nations and judgement on Israel.

Judgement by Yahweh who is king over all the Nations.

Judgement by the Creator God who made the nations.

And judgement isn't just punishment of the people. It also affects Creation. We see the Creator judging thru

Uncreation - a reversal of Creation. Let's look at a couple of examples.

In pronouncing judgement upon Babylon Y has this to say in 13:9-11

*Behold, the day of the LORD comes,  
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,  
to make the land a desolation  
and to destroy its sinners from it.*

**10** *For the stars of the heavens and their  
constellations*

*will not give their light;  
the sun will be dark at its rising,  
and the moon will not shed its light.*

An undoing of Creation. The sin of Babylon is cosmic in its consequences.

And then against Egypt in 19:5-7

Yahweh says,

*And the waters of the sea will be dried up,*

*and the river will be dry and parched,*

**6** *and its canals will become foul,*

*and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish*

*and dry up,*

*reeds and rushes will rot away.*

**7** *There will be bare places by the Nile,*

*on the brink of the Nile,*

*and all that is sown by the Nile will be parched,*

*will be driven away, and will be no more.*

Water - the symbol for life - is taken away.

Fruitfulness replaced by barren waste. Uncreation.

And Israel will also suffer a similar fate because of her disobedience. In Isaiah 5 Israel is described as a vine planted by God. But she produced only bad fruit. And so God will stop tending the vineyard.

*I will make it a waste;*

*it shall not be pruned or hoed,*

*and briers and thorns shall grow up;*

*I will also command the clouds*

*that they rain no rain upon it.*

An undoing of the order of Creation. A return to chaos and disorder.

And then there is a frightening picture of cosmic catastrophe in ch24.

*1 Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate,*

*and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants...*

*3 The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered;*

*for the LORD has spoken this word.*

Total devastation. And it's Yahweh who brings it about . Because of the desperate wickedness of the people he created. It's hard to imagine a bleaker, more thorough act of judgement - a

return to complete emptiness and chaos before Creation began.

But there is more in Isaiah. We have rays of hope breaking thru this dark picture. Isaiah speaks of a remnant of God's people being saved. And a figure known as a Root of Jesse who will save them.

*11:10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

*11 In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people*

And now we land in Isaiah 35 against this background. Yahweh, Sovereign king over the nations, judging sin. Including the sin of Israel. Yahweh the Creator bringing uncreation. But in the midst of this a window of hope. Israel's remnant saved by the Root of Jesse.

We see these same themes run thru ch35. Only it's different. We see judgement - but now it moves to the background. And brought to centre stage is redemption and salvation. And instead of uncreation we see the creator Re-creating - making things new.



We're going to look at the passage in 2 sections.

Vv1-7 and 8-10.

In 1-7 if we look carefully we notice a clear structure where the first 3 verses mirror the last 3. And then thrown into focus right in the middle is v4 which is the climax.

So we start off in vv1-2 with a picture of renewal. Life coming to the desert. It becomes like Lebanon and Mt Carmel, places famed for their trees and lush greenery. I don't know if you've ever been to the outback after rain. Suddenly the brown and yellow desert bursts into life - green grass and desert flowers bloom out of the sand.

Then to mirror that have a look at vv6-7. The wilderness and burning sands will fill with water and teem with life.

It's a beautiful picture. It's the language of Creation. God once again sending water on the dry ground and filling it with life. Re-creation. A reversal of judgement.

Notice that there's another aspect to this re-creation. Look in vv5-6. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk and the mute will shout for joy. Re-creation will involve restoration from the damage - from life marred by the scars of

sin - restored to the way they were meant to be.

We'll come back to this.

Now we come to the focal point in v4.

*Say to those who have an anxious heart,*

*"Be strong; fear not!*

*Behold, your God*

*will come with vengeance,*

*with the recompense of God.*

*He will come and save you."*

Don't be afraid. Your God will come. He will come with judgment - vengeance - and he will come to save. The Hebrew is a little bit tricky - the word for 'recompense' could also mean response or even

retribution. Either way, it's linked with vengeance - describing God's judgement. In Hebrew there are no fullstops. And the NIV leaves out the fullstop that we have in the ESV. I think it gives us a more helpful translation of the meaning.

*With divine retribution he will come to save you.*

So the author is wanting to clearly link judgement and salvation. We are somehow saved by God's judgement.

God will come. It's repeated for emphasis. He will come to judge and he will come to save. God's presence will make the difference. He will come

and make things right. The Immanuel - God with us - that Isaiah has introduced back in ch7.

And the result of him coming we see in our second section - vv8-10. There will be a highway taking the redeemed people back to Zion - Jerusalem. Those redeemed have been ransomed by Yahweh. Somehow he buys back this remnant, snatches them back from judgement.

The image here is a return from the wilderness. A second Exodus. The picture of water gushing from the desert sands is a vivid reminder of how he

provided for the Israelites in the wilderness coming out of Egypt.

Now Isaiah seems to be clearly talking about a future return for the exiles out of Babylon. A return to the land of Israel. But there's more to this promise than that. We don't see it in ch35, but from ch 40 onwards of Isaiah we hear about a servant whom Yahweh would send. He would be the one who would ransom his people. He is the one who will bring salvation. He would bring healing and restoration. A servant who would also be a king in the line of David, son of Jesse . This was the root of Jesse we met earlier.

Now at this point you may be thinking, "This is all very interesting Marshall, but what on earth does Isaiah 35 have to do with mission?"

The answer is, everything. Because as we'll see, God coming to bring judgement. God coming to bring salvation. The Creator making all things new - re-creating - that's where the whole story of the Bible is headed. That's God's mission that begins right back at Genesis 3 after sin enters the world.

And the whole project centres on one figure - the Servant King who would buy back - redeem and ransom - his people.

In Matthew 11 When John the Baptist was in prison he sends his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he is the one, the Messiah, or should they expect someone else.

*And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.*

With a couple of additions, this is exactly what we see in Isaiah 35 when God comes.

God has come. Come in the flesh. The Creator God. Immanuel. The Root of Jesse. He has come



undo the curse of sin. To re-create. And he has done it thru the cross.

Remember Isaiah 35:4?

*Behold, your God*

*will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.*

*He will come and save you.*

Jesus, the Son of God came. And His glory was shown most wonderfully at the Cross. Where judgement and salvation meet. Judgement of sin. Jesus himself bore the wrath of the Father to pay its price. And in that act of judgement we are saved by his blood.

The Cross is the centre of mission. Without it there is no good news. There is no redemption. There is no undoing of the curse.

The Cross is cosmic in its consequences. Just as sin has brought decay and destruction not just to individual humans, but to the whole of Creation, leading to that dreadful picture in Isaiah 24 of the end of the world - Jesus on the cross has brought about a reversal of all that - a healing for the whole of Creation - re-creating everything to wholeness.

Jesus could do what he did on the cross because of who he is. Only he was qualified to pay for the sin of the world and to redeem Creation.

When Julie and I were applying to be missionaries to Taiwan the Taiwanese authorities required certain qualifications for us to be allowed to work as missionaries. We had to be ordained. That was tricky because neither of us were ordained. So CMS ordained us. Not in a way that would be recognised by any church here - but it satisfied the Taiwanese government. We were now qualified to be missionaries.

Jesus was uniquely qualified to achieve an end to sin on the Cross. Only he can bring about re-creation and a reversal of the curse. Because he is the Creator.

Look with me at **Colossians 1:15 -20**. *He is the image of God. By him all things were created. V17 - He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And v20 - thru him God reconciles all things - whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Do you see how big God's mission is? It's not just about bringing individuals to new life thru

forgiveness in Jesus. It is that. And if it was only that, this mission in itself would be a wonderful message. But it's more than that. It's about the Son of God reconciling everything in heaven and earth, to himself, thru his blood. It's about bringing the whole of Creation under his kingship. It's about making all things right.

I want to finish off by spending a few minutes thinking about what all this means for you and I. You may be thinking - "it's great that Jesus reconciles the whole of Creation at the Cross but I'm not a missionary. How does it affect me?"

God's Mission is big. It's Cosmic. It affects everything. It's central to God's heart. It's central to the whole message of the Bible. And as God's people it's central to our purpose. It's part of the DNA of the church and for us as individual Xns as well.

If you haven't got the word "Missionary" stamped on your visa that doesn't mean you're not one. You're a missionary in your workplace. With your family. With your netball team. You don't need to be trained at Bible College. You don't need to be ordained . You're qualified to be a missionary if you belong to Jesus. You're set apart to be his

ambassador. And he can use you just by being ready to give an answer for your faith. By looking for opportunities to point those around you to Jesus.

Being used by God to bring forgiveness, healing and restoration is about being centred on Jesus and the msg of the Cross. Knowing that nothing will be right without him. Knowing that you need him and those around you need him.

We've got Vietnamese American friends working near us in Kaohsiung. Their ministry is with Vietnamese foreign workers. They regularly have

to deal with injustice and terrible treatment of these workers. They can lobby the Government for change and be advocates for the workers, and they do all that. But they know that at the end of the day only Jesus and the msg of the cross can bring real change.

Like with Victoria. She's a young lady I met one day in the markets where I go to tell bible stories. I didn't do anything - she called out to me - she was keen to learn English so I introduced her to Julie. Julie won't mind me saying that God working in Victoria's life wasn't due to Julie's language skills or her ability to share the gospel. God worked despite our fumbling efforts. Victoria had - and still has - lots of problems. Low self-esteem, an abusive



boyfriend, a dysfunctional family. Julie knew that only Jesus could meet Victoria's needs. Recently, we praise God that Victoria became a Xn. She's still struggling but she knows that it's only Jesus and the msg of forgiveness thru the Cross that can make things right for her.

If the message of the cross isn't central to what we do it's like trying to shut a cabin door on the Titanic to keep the water out after it's struck the iceberg.

A friend of mine recently went to the emergency dept suffering from chest pains. It turned out that he'd had a minor heart attack. He ended up needing a stent to open up an artery that was 99% blocked. Trying to help people

without Jesus is like giving my friend panadol when he needs heart surgery.

Only Jesus can deal with the poison of sin. Only he can help the alcoholic husband who can't escape the destructive cycles of behaviour that holds him captive.

Only Jesus can bring hope. To the aging parent with dementia. To the neighbour dying of leukemia. When everything the world offers has failed only Jesus offers a future hope. Resurrection. Life forever with him. Life without pain. Recreation.

Friends, there's no greater privilege than being used by the Creator of the Universe to be part of his cosmic mission. To bring the message of the cross to a world that needs to be saved. To proclaim the message that God has come. Come to judge and to save. Come to undo the curse. Come to recreate and to make all things right.