

The Highway Home [Isaiah 35:1-10]

Alan Hannah

Big Idea: Jesus doesn't just show us the way home; He IS the way home.

12.14.25

// INTRODUCTION [Story of Grace]

In the fall of 2023, one of our CIAC staff, who also attends ACAC, was walking with her kids in a city park when a young woman approached her using a translation app, asking where the nearest grocery store was. She gave this non-English speaking woman quick directions and started to walk away when the ***Holy Spirit gave her a nudge to go back.***

She turned around, introduced herself, and welcomed this woman, whom we'll call Grace, to Pittsburgh. ***Grace began to share her story...***

- She and her family were Christians from a small, majority-Muslim country and had fled due to severe religious persecution.
- They sold everything and had an incredibly difficult journey, but finally reached the U.S. border and requested asylum, knowing that returning home most likely meant death.
- They were allowed to enter and pursue their case, but ***here's the reality for asylum seekers...***
 - They receive no government assistance for food, housing, or medical care.
 - They're not legally permitted to work for nearly a year.

The day they met in that park was Grace and her family's third day in Pittsburgh. She hadn't met anyone, and her family was sleeping in the bus station with no idea of what would come next.

They were refugees. Displaced. ***Far from home and walking through a wilderness with no clear path forward.***

Let me tell you what has happened over the past two years...

- CIAC has walked alongside Grace and her family, helping them navigate the asylum process: filing for work authorization, preparing for immigration check-ins.
- ***The body of Christ has shown up in amazing ways...***

- A local attorney, in partnership with CIAC, has given nearly \$10K of free legal fees.
- Members of this church, by only the prompting of the Holy Spirit, have donated another \$10K to the family.
- Free housing was provided by 4 separate families, 3 of whom are from ACAC. This has allowed them to get on their feet, learn English, and find meaningful employment.
- When no one would hire Grace because of the language barrier, an ACAC member offered her meaningful employment.
- Just this past week, they signed their first lease.

Grace and her family know what it's like to be far from home and to walk through a dangerous wilderness, desperately needing a clear path forward. ***In different ways, that's all of our stories.***

While most of us are not refugees who have moved across the world for safety, opportunity, and a fresh new start. ***All of us, every single person here, knows what it feels like to be spiritually far from home.*** To feel lost. To be in exile. To wonder if we're on the right path. To long for something more.

Today, as we turn back to Isaiah, we'll find him speaking to people who knew exactly what that felt like as well. People who were displaced, far from home, and walking through the wilderness. ***And God gave them a promise that would change everything.*** Not only for them, but also for us.

Jesus doesn't just show us the way home; He IS the way home.

// PRIMARY TEXT [Isaiah 35:1-10]

¹Even the wilderness and desert will be glad in those days. The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses. ²Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers and singing and joy!

The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon, as lovely as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon. There the LORD will display his glory, the splendor of our God. ³With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. ⁴Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you."

⁵And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. ⁶The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland.

⁷The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived.

⁸And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. Evil-minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways; fools will never walk there. ⁹Lions will not lurk along its course, nor any other ferocious beasts. There will be no other dangers. Only the redeemed will walk on it. ¹⁰Those who have been ransomed by the LORD will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness. [Isaiah 35:1-10]

// **CONTEXT** [We're All Walking Through Wilderness]

Again, all of this is happening in the 8th century BC, the same timeframe as our first two weeks, when we talked about the mountain of God and the stump that will bring a new shoot. God's people are facing the threat of their worst enemy, the Assyrian empire, and **Isaiah knows what's coming next...** exile. Displacement. Tearing people from their homes and forcing them to flee to a foreign land. *Much like our friend Grace.*

If you know the story of Israel, this is a recurring theme.

- They were slaves in Egypt... displaced, longing for home.
- God brought them out through the wilderness, but that journey was hard, dangerous, and full of complaining and wondering.
- It was 40 years in the desert before they reached the Promised Land.

Isaiah here is saying it's going to happen again. Exile is coming. But this time, when God brings them home, it's going to be different. This time, there's going to be a highway.

Now, if you were an Israelite during this time, hearing Isaiah's message, here's what you would be thinking... **this is Exodus language.** When Isaiah talks about a highway through the wilderness, every Jewish person hearing this would think, *"He's talking about another Exodus. God's going to do it again."*

But here's the thing... Isaiah isn't just talking about a physical return from Babylonian exile for Israel. He's pointing to something much bigger. **He's talking about the ultimate homecoming, the day when God brings ALL His people back to Himself,** not just a geographic location.

Here's the truth... ever since Genesis 3, when humanity was expelled from the Garden, we've all been in exile. We've all been displaced from God's presence. ***We've all been wandering, trying to find our way back home.***

Think about this... every religion in the world is essentially asking the same question: *How do we get home to God? What's the path? What's the way? How do we navigate this?*

- Some think the path is morality – be good enough, do the right things, follow the rules.
- Some people think the path is knowledge – learn enough, study enough, become spiritually enlightened.
- Some people think the path is experience – feel the right things, have the right spiritual moments, achieve the right state of consciousness.

But Isaiah says... ***God is building a highway.*** And it's not about your ability to navigate it. It's about His provision to bring you home.

// THE HIGHWAY GOD BUILDS

I want us to look deeper at this highway found in verse 8 of our text.
(Acknowledge switch to ESV.)

⁸And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. [Isaiah 35:8]

Let me highlight 3 things about this highway that's important for us to recognize...

1. This highway is God's provision, not human construction.

Isaiah isn't saying here, "Find your way through the wilderness." He's saying, "God is paving a road." This isn't about your effort, skill, or ability to navigate. ***God is building the way home.***

In the original Exodus, the people wandered because they didn't know where they were going. They complained. They got lost. They were scared. ***In this new Exodus, there's a highway.*** There's a clear path. It's marked. It's built by God Himself.

In the verses right before this, Isaiah prophesies that water will break forth in the wilderness. That there will be streams in the desert. The burning sand will

become a pool. The parched ground will become a pool. This isn't just a road through the wilderness; the wilderness itself is being transformed.

This is anti-curse language. In Genesis 3, when humanity sinned, the ground was cursed, and as a result, there were thorns and thistles, hard labor, and separation from God. But Isaiah 35 here is reversing that! The desert blooms. Water flows. The curse is being undone.

This is more than just getting from point A to point B. ***This is about God making all things new.***

2. The path is clear, not because you're smart enough, but because God made it simple.

"Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray."

Let's be clear about what this DOESN'T mean. This isn't saying foolishness is good. This isn't anti-intellectualism. This isn't "check your brain at the door."

What it is saying is... You don't need to have everything figured out to walk with God. You can wrestle with questions and doubt. You don't have to have it all figured out. You don't need to be "*spiritual enough*," or "*smart enough*," or "*good enough*." The path is clear because God made it clear.

Think about our world now. ***Everything requires expertise.*** Your car breaks down? Better be able to afford a mechanic. Is your tech device not working? Better have good IT help. Your health insurance denies a claim? Good luck navigating that system.

We live in a world where everything is complicated, and everything requires knowledge and expertise. ***Sometimes we make our relationship with God the same way.*** Like you... need a PhD in theology, have to read all the right books, attend all the right conferences, have all the right spiritual experiences. Have an expert on call.

But Isaiah says, *"Even fools won't go astray on this highway."* Not because foolishness is wisdom. But because the highway is that clear. This is grace. ***This is God saying, "The journey home doesn't depend on you. It depends on me."***

3. This highway is called the Way of Holiness.

When we hear "*holiness*," we often think it means "*for the super spiritual people*." Like this road is for people who have their act all together.

That's not what Isaiah is saying. Look at that verse closely... *"It shall belong to those who walk on the way."* **The Way of Holiness is FOR the redeemed, not BY the righteous.**

The word "holy" in Hebrew means "set apart." It means consecrated, dedicated for God's purposes. This highway isn't for people who've earned their way onto it. **It's for people God's redeemed.** It's for people God has rescued.

You don't qualify for this highway by being holy. **You're made holy by walking it.** And that's the gospel. That's the Good News.

- Religion says, "Clean yourself up, then you can come." Jesus says, "Come to me, and I'll clean you up."
- Religion says, "Be good enough, and God will accept you." Jesus says, "I've already accepted you. Now follow me."

The highway is for the redeemed. And redemption is a gift, not an achievement.

Jesus doesn't just show us the way home; He IS the way home.

// JESUS IS THE WAY

Let me show you what I mean.... Fast forward 700 years from Isaiah.

Jesus is in the upper room with His disciples. It's the night before He's going to be crucified. His friends are confused, afraid, and uncertain about the future. Jesus has just told them He's going away, and they don't understand what He means.

Thomas speaks up, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

And Jesus responds with one of the most important statements He ever made.

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. [John 14:6]"

Jesus isn't giving directions. He's not handing out a map. He's not saying, "Let me show you the way." **He's saying, "I AM the way."**

This is Isaiah 35 fulfilled. Jesus is claiming to BE the Highway of Holiness. He's not just pointing to the path, He IS the path.

You don't walk the highway and then find Jesus. **You walk with Jesus, and you're on the highway.**

Following Jesus isn't about figuring out all the right steps, the right formula, the right spiritual techniques. It's about trusting Him. It's about saying, "*Jesus, I don't know the way home. But you do. So, I'm going to follow You.*"

I know what some of you are thinking... "*But what about all my questions? What about all the things I wrestle with and don't understand? What about the doubts I have?*"

Please hear me... You don't need all the answers to walk with Jesus. Thomas didn't understand everything; he even wrestled with doubt himself... but Jesus said, "*Follow me anyway.*"

- Peter denied Jesus three times. ***Still got on the highway.***
- Paul killed Christians before he met Jesus. ***Still found the highway.***
- The thief on the cross had no time to clean up his life, no chance to prove himself, no opportunity to figure it all out. Jesus said to him, "*Today, you'll be with me in paradise.*" ***Still made it on the highway.***

Even fools won't go astray on this highway. Because the highway is Jesus, and He doesn't lose people.

Jesus doesn't just show us the way home; He IS the way home.

// THE INVITATION

Here's where I want to get really personal with you. Because everything I've talked about today comes down to this one question... ***Are you on the highway?***

- Not "*Are you religious?*"
- Not "*Do you go to church?*"
- Not "*Are you a good person?*"

But have you stepped onto the highway? Have you said "yes" to Jesus?

Here's what Isaiah promised 2700 years ago and what Jesus fulfilled 700 years later. There's a way home. The highway is built. The path is clear, and it's Jesus.

But have you stepped onto it? You have to start walking.

Maybe you've never done that. You've never said, "*Jesus, I'm going to trust You. I'm going to follow you. I'm done trying to find my own way.*"

Maybe you did that years ago, but somewhere along the way, you stopped walking. You got tired. You got discouraged. You sat down on the side of the road and gave up.

Either way, this is your moment now. Your invitation.

Let me clearly tell you how to step onto the highway of Jesus.

Just like Grace from the beginning of this message, we are all spiritually displaced. ***We need a way home.***

²³*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.*
[Romans 3:23]

Jesus doesn't just show us the way home; ***He IS the way home.***

⁹*If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* ¹⁰*For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.* [Romans 10:9-10]

¹⁰*Those who have been ransomed by the LORD will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear,*

and they will be filled with joy and gladness. [Isaiah 35:1-10]

1. The journey on the highway isn't alone, it's communal.

This isn't a solo expedition. There aren't many highways; there's one. You're not walking alone; you're walking with all of the redeemed. You're walking with a family. ***We need each other on this journey.***

2. The destiny is joy.

Here's where we again hit the Advent tension, "*here but not yet.*"

We still experience sorrow. We still face pain. We still walk through wilderness seasons. But we have a promise that sorrow isn't forever. Mourning will disappear. ***Joy is on the horizon.***

This is actually the meaning of the 3rd week of Advent. It's about joy breaking through even while we wait. It's not about pretending everything is fine. It's not about ignoring the pain. It's about celebrating that joy is coming even while we're still walking.