

Isaiah 35:1-10 // What Will Heaven Feel Like?

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 35, verses 1-10, which can be found on page 720 of the Church Bibles. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon.

They will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way. Say to those with fearful hearts, be strong, do not fear, your God will come.

He will come with vengeance, with divine retribution, he will come to save you. 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. 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 haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there, it will be called the way of holiness. It will be for those who walk on that way.

[1 : 29] The unclean will not journey on it. Wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast. They will not be found there.

But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them.

And sorrow and sighing will flee away. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. It's a privilege to be with you.

I thank Pastor Martin and your leaders and all of you for this sacred privilege. Let's keep our Bibles open to Isaiah chapter 35.

And I would like us to take verse 10 and pick it up and sort of turn it over and over in our hands and look at it from different angles and see what's there and just enjoy it.

[2 : 41] Verse 10 again. By the way, Zion in this verse does not refer to any political entity in this world.

It's a biblical term for the people of God coming together from all the nations. The city of God, the heavenly city. It's shorthand for heaven itself above this world.

If you want to check that out, you can look at Hebrews chapter 12, verse 22 to validate what I'm proposing. They will come to Zion with singing.

Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy. And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Huh. That's interesting. That's about heaven. I wonder, what does the word heaven, what picture does that paint in your mind?

[4 : 05] In God's mercy, we actually know a few things about what heaven will be like. I'll do a quick summary in a minute, but here's what heaven will not be like.

Heaven will not be massed choirs up in the clouds. I'm not sure I'd want to do that forever. Heaven will not be like that moment in the Star Wars movie when Obi-Wan comes back to Luke Skywalker to encourage him in his quest.

And here's Luke in the frame there. Here's Luke, solid human. And Obi-Wan coming back from the dead, he looks like a hologram and he sort of has this, I don't know, you look like you maybe could put your hand right through him.

He's not solid. Heaven will not be like that. We talk about the afterlife. Actually, that's not a Christian way of thinking.

That did not come from Christianity. We think this is life, then we die, then we go into the afterlife.

[5 : 19] No, the Christian way of thinking is this existence we're stuck with right now. This is a living death. We're on our way to life through Christ and him alone if we will receive him now.

So, it's not an afterlife. It's a mega life. Real life. It will even be physical. Our bodies, the humblest part of us, will be resurrected.

Heaven will be human. It's wonderful. So, Jesus said, for example, let's just, before we get to this verse, a few insights about heaven.

Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you. Heaven is not a mere state of mind.

Heaven is a place. If you're staking your future on Jesus Christ and him alone, your final address will be at your place in heaven.

[6 : 34] It will be prepared for you. You'll not walk into heaven and look around and think, okay, I can get used to this.

I just hope I get Netflix up here. Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you. You will walk into heaven and look around and think, no way.

He thought of me. I love this. The Bible says in Revelation 21, the kings of the earth, the culture leaders at that time, will bring into heaven the glory and honor of the nations.

When Christ returns and brings us into his eternal kingdom, he will not delete all this culture creating we've been doing throughout history.

He will redeem our culture creating. Heaven will include our dress and music and clothing and humor and so forth.

[7 : 52] With all of it finally perfected, we will not have to brace ourselves against anything, you know, a musical lyric or whatever. We can open up completely.

It will be perfected and consecrated to God and more beautiful than ever before. The Bible also says that heaven will be the holy city.

It will combine the garden of Eden with the best that Jerusalem ever was perfected.

It will be a garden city. It will be a community. In heaven, everyone will like you.

Everyone you meet will feel like your new best friend. And there will be no strife.

[8 : 53] There will be no slums. There will be no graffiti and so forth. There will be no crime. Everyone will be loved and safe and dignified and truly, with no exaggeration, amazing.

The Bible also says that heaven will be like a bride adorned for her husband. Fascinating.

Heaven will feel like the euphoria, the romantic euphoria, of a happy wedding day.

We will not cower from Christ in dread. We will rejoice to be with Him at last. I remember seeing a photograph of my dad and mom on their honeymoon in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in 1946.

Mom made a little album. Here's the photo of them looking over the valley. And she wrote under the photograph there, Together at last.

[10 : 06] Like me, I'm sure you think at times, I wish I could go talk to Jesus.

I wish I could converse with Him face-to-face, real time. I'd love to ask Him my questions, and I'd love to hear His answers. You will.

intimately, lovingly. The Bible says more about heaven, so we have much to savor in advance, even in the darkness of this train wreck world we live in right now.

But today, let's ask two particular questions about heaven. One, what will heaven feel like?

That's what our verse is about. What will heaven feel like? Two, how does our future in heaven help us on earth today?

[11 : 15] What difference does heaven make right now? So, when we are finally with the Lord above, what will our emotions be? What will our psychology be?

What will our experience be? And, what difference does that make right now? Those are our two questions we want to think about.

And here in Isaiah chapter 35, verse 10, and here's an interesting thing about this verse, y'all. Isaiah repeats this verse, word for word, over in chapter 51.

The book of Isaiah is divided into chapters 1 through 39, and 40 through 66. This is the one time in the prophecy of Isaiah where the prophet takes a fairly big chunk, five lines, from the first part of the book and repeats it in the second part of the book because he really cares about this.

He wants us to know about this. This can get us through anything. So, let's think it through line by line. Line one. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return.

[12 : 29] Your translation might say those rescued by the Lord. Same sense. The ransomed of the Lord shall return.

The Lord has no intention of getting us into heaven the easy way, cutting corners. He paid a price for us.

That's why it says the ransomed of the Lord or those rescued by the Lord. Through his atoning death on the cross, Jesus paid a heavy personal price to get us back.

in the Old Testament, the Bible says that God rescued his people from slavery by his mighty hand and his outstretched arm. In other words, he exerted himself.

In the New Testament, Jesus said the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, to rescue many. He stuck his neck out.

[13 : 34] He gave his very life. In heaven, you will be happier than you are now. But you will not be more loved than you are now.

Nothing less than the dying love of Jesus has freed you from eternal doom and darkness. And there is nothing in this world that can stop Christ from taking you to heaven.

And then Isaiah also says that we who are ransomed or rescued by the Lord shall return. That's very interesting. Heaven will feel like a return, a coming home.

Remember how it just occurs to me, the Hobbit, the last line in the book. Sam comes back.

Maybe this is the Lord of the Rings. I forget which. Last line in the book. He walks in the front door of his little Hobbit home and he says, well, I'm back.

[14 : 58] Full circle. resolution. Resolved. Come home. This life takes us here, there. Maybe we're in Nashville. Maybe we're in Glasgow.

Wherever it might be. Toronto. We might think, what am I doing here? How did I get here? Sometimes we think, I'd rather be anywhere else than here.

even in our own hometown. We go back. And sometimes we feel like outsiders and strangers. It's moved on.

We're part of the past. And it's really distressing when, like the prodigal son, we find ourselves in a far country by our own foolish choices.

But even when we're following Christ, the journey of this life will inevitably break our hearts with a sense of distance, a sense of exile, a sense of outsidership.

[16 : 01] We can feel homeless and rootless like strays and wanderers. Often. Simone Weil wisely said to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.

And that yearning in our hearts is why Isaiah says the ransomed or rescued of the Lord shall return. Jesus died not only to bring us back to himself but also to bring us back to where we'll know we finally belong.

We're back home. The home we have not yet visited. But when we get there we'll breathe a deep sigh of relief and never want to leave.

We'll never be uprooted again. Line two. And they will come to Zion with singing. And of course as we've said Zion quote unquote has nothing to do with politics in this world.

And this church is an outpost of Zion in this world. And the Christian church is growing even growing exponentially all over the world today.

[17 : 35] Zion is appearing in time and will live forever in eternity. and with our diverse politics and ethnicities and histories we together embody God's new community.

But Isaiah isn't saying here that we'll come to church with singing wonderful as that is. He is saying that in heaven we will enter into and experience the community of joy joy that only the risen Jesus can create and we will not go there dragging our feet.

We will not go there looking at our peripheral vision for a way to get out of this. We will go into Zion with singing. We'll not be wondering how soon we can pack our bags and move on.

We will finally arrive. it will feel so good. I wonder I wonder what arrival looks like to you.

If you were to complete this sentence well I'll finally I'll finally arrive when I'll finally arrive when I write that best selling novel or when I land that big contract at work or when I break the Olympic records for the 800 meters or whatever.

[19 : 06] What does arrival look like to you and what if you did arrive in that way that you might desire? What if I did? We both know.

Eventually we'd end up feeling as unarrived and as distant and disappointed as ever and maybe more so. But that longing longing I'll finally arrive when.

That longing is not wrong it's prophetic it's reaching for heaven. So let's pin our longings on the one arrival that cannot let us down.

We will enter heaven with singing. Now okay singing is crazy. When we speak like this we don't risk as much vulnerability we don't risk as much embarrassment but if I were to break out in singing right now it would be uncomfortable for you and way more uncomfortable for me because okay the movie Singing in the Rain with Gene Kelly 1952 it's a silly ridiculous movie it's kind of fun to watch has anybody seen it?

Okay Gene Kelly's out there in Los Angeles and uncharacteristically it's raining and he's just fallen in love and in this scene in the movie he's sort of skipping down this street at night in LA singing his fool head off getting soaking wet and having a blast singing nobody behaves that way in real life why on earth would we put that in a movie?

[21 : 03] We are willing to suspend disbelief and allow ourselves to be swept up and into the story and enjoy it because way down deep intuitively we know there is a joy so potent we stop caring about saving face and we just sing our fool heads off we will enter heaven with that singing you don't need to take voice lessons first if you can laugh at a hilarious joke you can enter Zion with singing and you'll sound great don't worry about it I've only done this once in my life and it wasn't singing it was dancing but that's close enough it was 1966 my senior year in high school we were in an American football game I was on the team and with eight seconds to go in the fourth quarter just at the very very end of the game we ran this crazy risky play and it worked and we beat our crosstown rivals and this great big high school on the other side of town bunch of rich kids we beat them 20 to 13 with eight seconds to go bam and we were so happy

I was there on the field with my buddies we literally danced our way from the 35 yard line to the goal line for the point after touchdown we didn't care what anybody thought in fact I looked up at the stands and all my friends they were dancing heaven will feel like that we'll be too happy to care in this cynical world we're even made to feel like being happy is it should be felt to be embarrassing only stupid people are happy excuse me we're Christians we don't believe that we believe the more profound a person you become in Christ the happier you get and you risk loss of faith by just giving yourself permission to be happy and we thereby become a prophetic presence in this world right now as we start even now to sing our way into Zion you were made to become happy in Christ so happy you can't contain it and in this world right now we shed many tears and we have much anguish and we have much pain and we have much sorrow and we share that together we come together and lock arms and we just keep going but when those moments of heavenly happiness slide from the future back into our present moment now let's never apologize it's a foretaste of heaven line three everlasting joy shall be upon their heads what an interesting thing to say everlasting joy shall be upon their heads why did

Isaiah tell us that because he wants us to know our joy in heaven will not be worked up by us our joy will come down upon us our joy will not be our willpower striving up to God our joy will be God's grace smiling down on us our joy will not be a subjective wish fulfillment it will be an objective reality coming upon us and we will not need to keep it up it will keep coming down in endless fullness and that joy will not be our achievement it will be God's bestowment it will not be our mood of the moment it will be God's happiness spilling over onto us we will finally know and feel how much he really does love us some years ago I went through a very very difficult time and for the first time in my life

I felt that reality demanded of me that I consider this possibility so I thought God loved me it looks like he absolutely hates me so which is it I have come to believe again more deeply than before that God does love me I feel downright spoiled but I didn't think my way from that despair to this settledness I didn't even theologize my way from there to here I don't know how I got out of that except God wouldn't let me go and if right now you're asking that question you can pray

I can't dig my way out of this Lord I need you to lift me out and then just hang on don't quit get up tomorrow morning put one foot in front of the other God hears and treasures that precious prayer he will answer that prayer line four they shall obtain gladness and joy now why is that line there because all our lives they shall obtain gladness and joy all our lives we've been hoping to attain or obtain some sort of ultimate human experience some final experience some version of happiness that will stick and will last and not get old and not fade away and

[28 : 16] God does give us many happy moments in this life but the lasting unfading joy we long for is always just out of reach but in heaven we will obtain gladness and joy we will rightly possess through Christ permanently possess gladness and joy and nothing truly happy will ever be denied us so for example if we were pleasure seekers in this life we will be in heaven deluged with holy pleasures if we were money lovers in this life we will become truly wealthy beyond calculation if we were power hungry in this life we will be honored and lifted up with a sacred beauty that looks like

Jesus himself nothing desirable will be withheld from us everything worthy will be given to us we will obtain gladness and joy as our lasting solid personally owned reality gladly given to us by Christ in overflowing abundance hey when we started following Jesus we didn't give anything up we're not sacrificing we're getting in on the greatest thing in the universe it's like this is awesome what are we doing here right last line and sorrow and sighing shall flee away okay so now Isaiah reminds us of this life sorrow and sighing and he's telling us what heaven will not feel like so these very familiar experiences in the here and now the catastrophic devastation of sorrow the daily tedium the blas the drudgery of sighing all our sufferings and disappointments in this life at all levels with all the damage to our physical and mental health in heaven we won't struggle our way out of sorrow and sighing our sorrow and sighing will hightail it flee away so maybe 30 seconds into heaven you and

I'll be standing there and we're looking around and we're experiencing this nuclear powered healing and freedom and relief and happiness together and because we're in God's presence finally his immediate felt presence and I might turn to you right in that moment and I might say wait a minute what just happened my anxiety and depression and heartache and trauma just the blahs just the sort of just weighed on me throughout all those years on earth where has my sorrow and sighing gone

I mean I'm looking around for it here but this new reality is so strange I mean what is what's happening to me I might ask you that and you'll say Ray there you go again just being ridiculous all your misery long gone man it has fled away that whole mess of it saw you the way you are now and that misery knew it was in trouble so all you're said is got out while it had the chance good riddance right and I'll say yeah and we'll high five each other and we'll just throw our heads back and laugh uproariously for the sheer joy of it and our Lord Jesus Christ right there he'll just beam with approval and maybe he'll say want to take a walk and have a look around maybe meet some amazing people let's go come on we'll say sure there we go the adventure begins you and I will discover what it really feels like to feel complete and free and healed and happy how will that happen it will not be our attainment our triumph our grandiosity our success it will be

Jesus his grace for the undeserving through his cross in his presence his fullness of joy how could it be otherwise guys listen we've parachuted into a universe where sadness is temporary derivative parasitic and defunct and where joy is ultimate original formidable and permanent joy will win our joy will devastate our happiness sadness no I didn't want to say that our joy will devastate our sadness that's what I meant to say you know what I mean now just briefly what difference does that make right now just one quick quote from Peter Kraft suppose both death and hell were utterly defeated suppose the fight was fixed suppose

[35 : 21] God took you on a crystal ball trip into your future and you saw that despite everything your sin your smallness your stupidity you could have free for the asking through Christ your whole crazy heart's deepest desire heaven eternal joy if you took that guided tour would you not return fearless and singing what can earth do to you if you are guaranteed heaven to fear the worst earthly loss would be like a millionaire fearing the loss of a penny even less a scratch on a penny that helps doesn't it when we keep the eye of faith on the presence of God through Christ in heaven we can face life and death as it is fearless

John Wesley the founder of the Methodist movement said I love this he said our people die well friends in Christ by his grace for his glory let's live well let's die well we're going to heaven when my dad was a pastor in California back in the 1960s a man in our church a young man was a medic in the U.S.

army during the war in Vietnam he wrote my dad a letter here's what he wrote the night we were overrun by 300 Viet Kong was a night I will never forget we had some 40 wounded and 20 killed in that moment of darkness there was brightness for me and for one of the guys I was treating for he accepted the Lord in the middle of the battle though he left me a few minutes later I'll never forget the radiance on his face being wounded about the chest and the legs and arms the pain had no bearing for the Lord had come to him and brought him more comfort than any medical man could you can accept the Lord right in the middle of the battle you can receive his atoning death for your sins and every reason why you should be excluded from heaven you can receive his promises of that glorious future forever he loves to give heaven to the undeserving which is every one of us and all you do all you can do is just open up the empty hands of faith and receive and he promises you his whole heart and the best heaven he can build which is pretty good we've just thought about it will you open up those empty hands right now receive

God bless you let's pray thank you father for these wonderful promises of the future we can't wait help each of us to be definite about receiving Jesus we ask in his holy name amen amen Amen.