

## Third Sunday in Advent

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 35:1-10

*The Ransomed Shall Return*

**The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; he desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; 2 it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. 3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. 4 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.” 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; 7 the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. 8 And 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. 9 No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. 10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and 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.**

**35:1** *dry land shall be glad.* The personification of nature is common in Isaiah (see 33:9; 44:23; 55:12). (CSB)

The Arabah. The land joins in celebrating God’s redemption. Cf Rm 8:19–22. (TLSB)

In the previous chapter we read about sulfur, blazing pitch, thorns, nettles, and brambles. In this chapter we read about blossoms, splendor, bubbling water, and green grass. It is difficult to imagine a sharper contrast. In the previous chapter Isaiah announced the coming judgment; in this chapter the prophet announces the coming deliverance. (PBC)

Thus the field, the meadow, is properly called happy when the year looks its most beautiful. By this picture he also describes the flourishing church, though there is a desert there. The church flourishes inwardly, not in power, in the wisdom of the flesh, in the gleam of splendid works; but it walks along in a simple form, not in ostentatious holiness, and therefore appears to be quite forsaken and without any glitter. Yet there are internal flowers and delights there, but these are not visible, namely, confidence, peace, life, a cheerful conscience, things that are not seen. But it does shine outwardly with obedience, love, humility, etc., which do not seem great in the eyes of the world. (Luther)

*wilderness.* The Arabah. The desert mentioned here is really the deep cleft on the Jordan valley which runs down through the Dead Sea and on to the Gulf of Aqabah, a very barren and inhospitable region. In other words, the transformation will be as striking as can be. (Leopold)

*crocus.* This describes how people commonly conceive of the Land of Canaan: desert and wilderness. The southern and southeastern parts of the land, with its arid and semi-arid climate, fit the description. Few springs flow constantly in these regions. When it does rain, the dry and hardened ground cannot absorb the moisture, resulting in a rush of water down the wadi, sometimes with destructive force. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 1)

In Israel this is a flower and so was present in the desert and after a rainfall. The Hebrew for this is a lesson in translated rose. (TLSB)

**35:2** *rejoice with joy and singing.* Fertile areas renowned for their beautiful trees and foliage. (CSB)

Celebration of creation continues along Israel's coast. (TLSB)

Isaiah contrasts the southern and southeastern with the north and northwestern parts of Palestine: The Carmel mountain range and the agriculturally productive Plain of Sharon, and further north in the forested areas of Lebanon. These regions offer lush and rich growth, remaining green and beautiful even during the summer months. Only God could bring about such climate reversal, demonstrating his great glory and majesty. By initiating the messianic age in his incarnation, Jesus ended the drought of this fallen world and showered all nations with his life-giving forgiveness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 1)

Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon are places noted for their rich fertility and beauty. Lebanon's cedars were highly prized in OT times. Solomon sought them for the temple. Carmel, range of hills, was noted for its thick and luxuriant growth. Sharon, a coastal plain in northern Palestine, was at one time thickly forested with oaks. It was also noted for its dense vegetation and even for its flowers. God will transform the desert, make it bloom, and fill it with the best from these three green places. (PBC)

*glory of the Lord* – This is the first time Isaiah uses the term “the glory of the Lord.” But it will appear three times in the second half of his prophecy. In Isaiah 40:5, God quotes the voice in the desert proclaiming, “The glory of the Lord will be revealed.” In Isaiah 58:8, the glory of the Lord becomes a rear guard for the His people much as it was for the Israelites in the wilderness. In Isaiah 60:1, God's people are encouraged to arise and shine, for “the glory of the Lord rises upon” them. Isaiah's use of the term in this chapter seems to prepare us for the rest of his prophecy. His prophetic message will soon give way to a historical interlude, and this chapter seems to point us to the following second half of the prophecy. The glory of the Lord and the splendor of our God are sights for the redeemed of God. The glory of the Lord was a cloud that filled the tabernacle at its dedication (1 Kings 8:11). Earlier in the history of Israel, the glory of the Lord led God's people throughout their wanderings in the wilderness. It was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The glory of the Lord is connected with God's saving activity on behalf of His people. (PBC)

Common theme in Is, mentioned 37 times (e.g., 6:3; 60:1; 62:2); denotes His real presence with Israel (cf Ex 40:34–38; 1Ki 8:10–12). (TLSB)

**35:3** *strengthen* – This is wonderful comfort that is to be understood not in a physical but in an internal sense, because it shines under the appearance of the cross. For this church of Christ is extremely poor and wretched in appearance, since its poor, distressed, naked, imprisoned, and dishonored are the refuse of all and loathsome to all men for the sake of Christ's name. And the members of the church are exposed to all, to Satan and to the craftiness and power of the world and the flesh. They are like “the offscouring of the world” (1 Cor. 4:13). It is as if people were saying: “They are to be regarded as a misfortune and a monster. If we could only be rid of these scoundrels.” With all their might they exert themselves to expel and exterminate this utterly loathsome Christian people. So we see today that all the most criminal people are less disturbed than the members of this church. Therefore the inward joy of the spirit fights with the grief of the body exposed to the cross. Therefore the prophet comforts them with exceedingly great consolations. *Strengthen*. This is a command. As long as Satan is awake he will not stop attacking us. It is for us to stand in the battle line against his stratagems. (Luther)

*weak hands* – This is a picture of people being dragged or driven into slavery. They are worn out by forced marches. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

The feeble hands, unsteady knees and fearful hearts all point to the same problem, that is, man's fear of the power of the world. Israel, confronted with the might of the world superpowers, could do nothing but tremble and take what she was dealt. Likewise the sinner, confronted by unrighteousness, can only quake, waiting for God's rightful wrath. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Weak hands signify lack of courage to go on. It points to men who see no purpose in living. (Leopold)

These shake when one is afraid. As the people prepare to enter this abundant and fertile land, they are commanded to be strong. (TLSB)

The hands that are so weary. Give medicine to those hands so that you become strong again. For Satan has two ways of fighting. He would gladly cast the faithful down suddenly from their joy and faith and into fear and despair. Secondly, he cunningly strives by long lasting torments and by the unremitting pressure of the torments to tire them out. It is as Cyprian confesses: "Satan did not want the captive brothers to be killed in this life, but he preserved them in a long life and distressed them with unremitting aggravation to the point of exhaustion." These are extremely powerful attacks. Against Satan's continuous attack we must set our continuous divine help. The devil is a spirit at leisure and thinks of nothing but to take us by storm. We ought not have slack and idle hands over against his deceptions. Have we not experienced in these ten years how he tried by various forces to frighten us away from faith in the Gospel? First through the terrors of the papists, then through the world's disgrace, then through murdering tyrants, through the fanatics, the schismatics, and fatherly flatteries. The church must diligently oppose his stratagems. (Luther)

**35:4** *anxious heart* – In Hebrew: "To those who are hasty and speedy in heart," who are not steady and firm but want to run away and give Satan the victory. (Luther)

*Be strong, fear not.* Cf. God's words of encouragement to Joshua in Jos 1:6–7, 9, 18. (CSB)

Command Isaiah uses elsewhere (8:12; 41:10, 13; 43:1; 51:7; 54:4). (TLSB)

In spite of the aforesaid worries and fears, God's Word roars in with encouragement and hope. God is greater than the nations or anything that would turn our lives into a desert wilderness haunted by unclean things. Luther: "Though all devils were rolled into one, my God is greater still" (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

In the previous chapter, the nations were invited to listen and pay attention to the revelation of the Lord's anger. That announcement of judgment brought no comfort. Instead, the graphic, gory description was intended to shock and terrify. It did. Even believers may stand horrified by the graphic details, but no one ever comforted by the threats of God. So God has a different message for His people: "Be strong, do not fear." It is the gospel message. How often the Scriptures give us that message. God does not wish to terrify and threaten. Through Christ, sins that deserve fierce punishment from God are forgiven. Through Christ, death becomes a sleep from which He will awaken us. The gospel steadies the weak hands and legs of His children when they have no power to go forward. (PBC)

We ought to strengthen ourselves with these words and say, "Though all devils were rolled into one, my God is still greater." The afflicted must be comforted with such spiritual consolations of the Word, not with any fleshly comfort which does nothing for troubled consciences but with spiritual comfort and with the living Word of God they must be ruled and strengthened. (Luther)

God is greater than any country and any of our problems, even our hearts as stated in 1 John 3:20 “whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”

Ephesians 6:10 “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

*God will come.* Similar language is used of the coming of the Messiah (see 62:11; cf. Rev 22:12). (CSB)

The believer is to take heart because God, Himself, will come! What’s more, His coming will not be quiet but powerful and with authority. Also God’s coming has a specific purpose – “He will come to save you!” To him who says, “He is too far away, I cannot reach him,” the beautiful answer is, “You do not have to reach Him; He comes to you. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Psalms 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear?”

Isaiah 62:11 “The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’”

Revelation 22:12 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

*vengeance ... recompense.* Do not avenge yourselves. He is the God of vengeance, He will fittingly requite them and save you. Thus we see that vengeance always comes before they carry out their plan. So Jerusalem, opposing the Word, was stormed by the Romans; then Rome perished. Thus the Spirit comforts us, as if to say, “Remain godly and constant and be lifted up. The Lord will come in time of trial, and He will avenge and save you.” So he comforts the church that is exceedingly hateful to the world and Satan and besides does not shine with outward splendor. On the contrary, it is pressed down by a very heavy cross; it is also beset and harassed by a variety of internal evils, such as weakness of faith and falling into sin. Beyond all these, Satan, the tempter, fights against it. (Luther)

*will come and save you* – The Lord of glory comes to strengthen and lead them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

**35:5 then** – This word sets off the natural result of God’s rescue and restoration. When God intervenes, there is no question about it – blessings will come forth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

*eyes ... ears.*† Quoted by Jesus (Mt 11:5). Cf Is 29:18; 30:20–21. (TLSB)

God’s salvation mentioned in verse 4 does the healing. When Jesus did miracles of healing he was declaring the presence of the messianic age in himself. While he did not heal everyone while he was on earth the spiritual healing was done in his resurrection and was for all people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 1)

Notice that no freedom from oppression is mentioned here, only the fact that a new era, a new abundant life, is ushered in with God’s coming. Certainly, freedom from external oppression is part of God’s total promise (cf Is 43:14; 48:20), but aside from the more important divinely given inner restoration, physical freedom can be a curse or a blessing. With God’s restoration and deliverance, God’s people can and will endure through the many challenges in their lives (Phil. 4:13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

In that time when the church will flourish in the midst of drought and will be cultivated in the desert, the blind will see plainly, etc. This is taken literally with reference to the miracles of Christ and the church, as we read in the last chapter of Mark (Mark 16:17, 18), signs that were necessary to confirm the new Word, signs that were added to the glory of the church, signs that are not done physically in the last time of the church, now that Christ is no longer weak. They were necessary then as a witness to the Jews, who ought to have recognized the church of God. Allegorically, in the time of the Gospel there were opened (1) *the eyes of the blind*, or ignorant, as we see happening today; (2) *the ears of the deaf*, who now accept the Gospel; (3) *the lame* walking in their own superstitions, as Isaiah calls all idolaters lame, people who walk around in some sect of their own. They limp on one leg. They do not walk in an upright faith. Then, however, when they accept the Word by faith, they walk upright and leap for spiritual joy in Christ. (4) *And the tongue of the dumb sing for joy*, namely, it will glory in a strong confession, and the mercy of the Lord shown to us is proclaimed and boasted; and they will say: “See how God has rescued us from the darkness!” (Luther)

**35:6** *lame leap ... tongue of mute.* † Quoted by Jesus to show that he was the Messiah (Mt 11:5). (CSB)

The people of the Bible considered both those who infirm and the desert wilderness to be in the clutches of death – barren and worthless (2 Sam 9:8’ Jer 2:6; Jn 9:2). This prophecy had at least partial fulfillment in Jesus’ ministry (Mk 7:31-37; Luke 7:22; John 7:37). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

*Water ... streams.* † Cf. God’s provision of water in Ex 17:6; 2Ki 3:15–20. (CSB)

In a land as dry as Israel, water poignantly symbolizes life and salvation (Jer 2:13). New life blossoms where once only dreariness, misery, and death could be found. Note that the water does not simply appear, but it “gushes forth” (“breaks out” KLV, ASV; “burst forth” NKJV). There is no stopping it once it appears. As the life-giving waters flow where they will, so do they renew the dead and barren. Water changes the desert. So does Jesus, the “living water” (Jn 4:10-11), rescue and restore those who have “forsaken” the Lord, the spring of living water” (Jer 17:13) and are entrapped in the wilderness of sin and death. He will lead them to “springs of living water” (Rev 7:17), where perfect eternal peace will reign. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

That is, they are parted and distributed. As a spring flows forth in moistening streams, so this church, which was desert, should gush out in streams of the teachings of the Gospel, always one stream leaping from another into one city and then another, although in the eyes of the world it might seem forever desert. (Luther)

**35:7** *burning sand* – Images of a desert mirage might come to mind when considering the various translations of this phrase; “ parched ground” (KJV; NKJV); “glowing sand” (ASV). A mirage is nothing but a bitter, disappointing illusion that water is present in the place where it is most needed. The false hope that the world offers to those wandering in the desert of sin is only that – false and fruitless. When examined closely, the civic righteousness of men, the false promises of the world, and the deceitful lies of Satan reveal themselves for what they really are. However, God’s promise is real. Through God’s unbreakable promise to His people, the mirages of our world will fade away and be replaced by a real lake of “living water.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

*springs.* The picture here is the wonderful change that the coming of the Lord would bring. It is a wonderful spiritual transformation. The change in the heart of every believer is such a miraculous transformation. Where there was death because of sin, life springs up by faith in the Messiah – cool, refreshing life, sustained by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. (PBC)

That is, where formerly there was total dryness, there will now be not only streams but also pools and springs. Thus the church will grow in such a way that elsewhere and in other places our streams will become springs. The Word of God will come in abundance. (Luther)

*reeds and rushes.* Plants that grow in marshes and lakes (cf. 19:6–7). (CSB)

Dragons and serpents like above all to be in dry places, as we see from experience today. As this was formerly a desert, most dreadful in dryness, but now because of the exceeding abundance of moisture has become a place where reeds and rushes grow, so there was nothing but heat, dryness, and ungodliness as long as the Word was absent, but now with the preaching of the Word it is moist and joyful. The serpents and dragons are those who teach ungodly things and with their most pestilential teachings take possession of men's souls and consciences, whom also Christ calls a brood of vipers (Matt. 23:33). (Luther)

**35:8-10** For similar descriptions of the messianic age and its consummation at the end of time, cf 11:6–12; 40:1–11; 41:17–19; 43:14–21; 48:20–21; 65:17–25. (TLSB)

**35:8** *highway.* A road built up to make travel easier. (CSB)

One of many images describing the wilderness turning into a garden, bringing the return of the exiles (41:18; 42:15). (TLSB)

The highway enables God's people to traverse the desert. The desert is a place of death. A whole generation of Israel died there during the 40 years. And every year on the Day of Atonement, a scapegoat carried the sins of Israel out into the desert (Lev. 16:20-22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

At the time of Isaiah, roads were little more than well-traveled and familiar paths used by almost everyone. (PBC)

This highway shall both ease the way over ravines and difficult places but shall also serve perfectly as a road leading them that use it directly to their destination. (Leopold)

*the Way of Holiness.*† The way set apart for the redeemed (v. 9). In ancient times, certain roads between temples were open only to those who were ceremonially pure. (CSB)

Language of the exodus from Egypt is another rich source of imagery (cf 11:12, 16; 51:9–10). Jesus told His disciples that He is the way (Jn 14:5–6). (TLSB)

The name of the highway reflects Isaiah's special name for God – the Holy One of Israel. Holiness is the quality God requires of His people. Not everyone can travel on this road. The unclean cannot travel on this route. It is a route only the holy people of God. Those who travel on the highway are the saints of God, the believers in the Savior. (PBC)

Where formerly there were serpents in the haunts of dragons, that is, pestilential teachers. The Gospel condemns them all. When these have been put to flight, the place will be safe. Indeed, there will be a highway and a royal road, yea, even a holy way. By way of contrast, look at the ungodly, who promise their disciples many things, including a royal highway; but if you look with spiritual eyes, you will see nothing but impassible places and precipices from which they have been hurling down their followers. (Luther)

*unclean shall not pass over it* – his way is so guarded that it is impossible for an unclean person to walk on it. All other ways put up with the ungodly. No sect can deny this. As the proverb says, “the cowl covers many a rascal.” However, no ungodly person will walk on this way of faith and the Gospel. It will not have the corrupted and unclean walk on it. (Luther)

Language of the exodus from Egypt is another rich source of imagery (cf 11:12, 16; 51:9–10). Jesus told His disciples that He is the way (Jn 14:5–6). (TLSB)

*shall belong...who walk on the way* – That is, this way is such for them in such a manner that no corrupted and ungodly and foreign person walks on it, but *it shall be for them*, that is, it will not be without traffic, but many godly people will be walking on it. It is not to be doubted that these are the hearers and doers of the Word. (Luther)

*fools...shall not go stray* The Hebrew is unclear. It appears to say, “That even the fools may not go astray there.” They who are regarded as simpletons and fools in the eyes of the world are properly called fools, just as the Word, too, is a word of foolishness. Therefore he says that those who are fools before the world but wise in faith walk on the way. (Luther)

Those new to this path. (TLSB)

**35:9** *lion ... beast*. Sometimes wild animals made travel dangerous (see Dt 8:15; Jdg 14:5). (CSB)

Presence of ferocious beasts is a sign of God’s curse (Lev. 26:22). (TLSB)

The Hebrew word לִוְיָוִט means highway robbers and thieves, who do not travel on the royal road but on byways. That is to say, this way will be safe, since the lions, that is, the disturbers and teachers of traditions, will not be there, but sincere pastors of the Gospel, who do not permit robbers and butchers that tear us apart with a variety of opinions, but rather guide us on the same unique way. The butchers are the ones who tear us apart with works, persons, places, and numberless works of righteousness. Then we indeed have lions and ravenous beasts on the way. This unique way of faith, however, gathers me up so that I may not be torn to pieces nor go off on impassible places nor fall into this or that righteousness, but that it may keep me, even me, on the one way, Christ. (Luther)

No dangerous lion or ferocious beast can harm believers on the way of holiness. Faith in the Savior places every believer on the road to heaven, and then God protects every believer on the journey to the heavenly Zion. (PBC)

*they will not be found there* – That is, they will not be permitted to be found on this way, and to that end the pastors will be alert. What does Paul mean when he says that there are many wicked in the church? I answer: They are among us, but they are not of us. They are the excrement and spittle of the body, not members of the body, the church. Therefore this way will be pure. (Luther)

*redeemed.*† Those the Lord has delivered from the bondage of sin, prefigured by the deliverance of Israel from foreign slavery (cf. 1:27; 51:10; 62:12). (CSB)

The Hebrew root for redeem refers to fulfilling one’s obligation as a kinsman to defend a relative or to buy him out of death or slavery (Lev. 25:25-28). That God is our Redeemer suggests first that we are involved in a debt we cannot pay, and second, that God is willing to take up the “obligation” to rescue us, an act of great mercy. Jesus, not ashamed to be our kinsman (Heb 2:11), is the redemptive price that brings us forgiveness and rescue from sin and death (Col 1:14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 1)

We have translated “Those who have been set free again will walk there,” that is, in Christian liberty, when the beasts and wolves are warded off by watchful shepherds. Then they will walk safely and securely in freedom, because, redeemed by the Word, they cannot be led astray by laws and traditions, but walk in freedom of conscience. You know that Christian liberty is outwardly subject to all men but inwardly it is lord over all things. It can be condemned by no sin, Satan, Law, etc. Thus it has its being in Christ alone. Meanwhile let the outer man be subject to all, but let not the conscience give in on one title. You will say: “However much I am an unclean sinner, sin, Satan, and Law have nothing against me. All these neither condemn nor confound me. Thus no righteousness, uprightness, etc. will deliver us. Christ alone is our deliverer. This is Christian liberty. (Luther)

**35:10** Repeated verbatim in 51:11. (CSB)

*ransomed of the Lord* – Who are they who walk on this way? None other than *the redeemed of the Lord*. To redeem means to pay the price. For we have been redeemed and purchased at a great price, namely, with the blood of Christ. This is the thunderbolt against all our works. It has a passive significance. It means that we were all sold under sin and death. But we have been purchased by the Lord, and at great cost we are the redeemed of the Lord, not with gold and silver, but with His precious blood. Not with our zeal, not by our works, but we are *the redeemed of the Lord*. (Luther)

Those whom God has rescued in a lasting way, foreseen by the exodus. (TLSB)

*come to Zion with singing*. As the Israelites did when they returned from Babylonian exile (see Ps 126). (CSB)

They will once again dwell in Jerusalem. Vision points to the eternal city and rest of God’s people (Rv 7:9; 21:1–3). (TLSB)

*everlasting*. Vision points to the eternal city and rest of God’s people (Rv 7:9; 21:1–3). (TLSB)

They will spend their time in perpetual and eternal praises, because the Redeemer will also abide forever. Therefore Paul says (Gal. 5:22): “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace” and (Phil. 4:4): “Rejoice in the Lord always.” (Luther)

*obtain gladness*. They will be pursued, not by wild animals (v. 9) but by gladness and joy (cf. Ps 23:6). (CSB)

There will be complete and perfect joy that drives out all sadness. This is an excellent description of the church in this very short chapter, from which many New Testament writers have drawn, namely, that this church is happy and joyful, safe from all stratagems of Satan, that consciences are not burdened with various and divergent traditions, but that it is redeemed of the Lord, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and that it goes on happy and rejoicing in gladness. (Luther)

*sorrow ... will flee*. Cf. 25:8; 65:19. (CSB)

**Ch 35** The Lord prepares the salvation of His exiled people. Today, no matter what foolishness or fear has snared you, confess your sins in the confidence that the Lord has redeemed you by grace alone and has prepared for you a new way of life. • Take my trembling hand, Lord Jesus, and lead me to the comforts of Zion. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – James 5:7-11

*Patience in Suffering*

**7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.**

**5:7-8** Patience is urged. Jesus is still accomplishing his task. Wait for the crop like the farmer. What should the “brothers” (pastors) do? Preach the Word, administer the Sacraments. Patience is required—one might say that the farmer is Jesus, and he is assisted by his co-workers—so Paul urged Timothy to instruct patiently (2 Tim 4:2). Since the coming of the Lord is at hand, be patient. Patience equals persistence in spite of an unfavorable environment. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

**5:7** *be patient therefore brothers* – Based on trust in God’s promises. (TLSB)

James is addressing the pastors of congregations and how they are to lead their people. The reason for patience is that Jesus is still applying the benefits of His atonement on earth through the preaching of the Gospel and premature return would disrupt this work. Patience in the NT is not only a virtue required by Christians, as James indicates here, but it is also a virtue of God, who hesitates to express his anger in judgment to allow time for unbelievers to repent. (Scaer)

In the same way, Christians will not always see proof of God’s power, authority, and plans. In the short term, we will often see what looks like proof of the opposite – that Satan owns and controls this planet, that we are on our own, that there is no deliverance from suffering. (PBC)

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

*brothers* – Following a stern rebuke of the wealthy (4:13-5:6), James now speaks words of comfort, addressing his readers with a more personal term (cf. vv.9,10). (TLSB)

*coming of the Lord* – This is about the visible return of Jesus on the Last Day (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39) – All of us need judgment day therapy to keep our thinking straight, that is, regular reminders that Christ the King will return soon, without warning, as judge and Redeemer. (PBC)

Jesus’ return in glory (2Th 2:1). (TLSB)

For it is only for a short while that they are obliged to suffer. One fact always is held before their eyes, namely, that their Lord is coming, that He will surely return in glory. Yet a little while, and He that is coming will come, and will not tarry, Heb. 10:37. (Kretzmann)

*farmer waits* – Confident that the harvest will come, a farmer patiently waits for the crop to ripen. Similarly, confidence in Christ’s return leads to patience. (TLSB)

*precious fruit* – timion – This term is associated with the atonement. (Scaer)

*early and the late rains.* In Israel the autumn rain comes in October and November soon after the grain is sown, and the spring rain comes in March and April just prior to harvest (Dt 11:14; Jer 5:24; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:24). (CSB)

This refers to the rains which come in Palestine just before the sowing, causing the seed to germinate, and before the final harvest, causing the plants to produce the most abundant crops possible. The early rain comes in the late fall, and the late rains in early spring. In referring to the rains James is speaking no more of agriculture than Paul is with his reference to watering what has been planted. James with the agricultural imagery used in Jesus' parables is referring to God's providing the Gospel for the church. (Scaer)

**5:8** *establish your hearts* – This is a plea for Christians not to desert the faith. Standing firm in Christianity, especially in the midst of the temptations associated with persecution, becomes more tolerable when Christians realize that the delay in God's coming in judgment, is for the purpose of a greater salvation. (Scaer)

The Scriptures are full of encouragement to see our pain and troubles as temporary and bearable in the light of God's eternal promises. The seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 all sound the theme of that grand book: overcome. Satan tries hard to use our sorrows as proof that he has won. But the blood-stained cross and empty tomb of Christ shout even more loudly that sin, death, hell, and Satan have lost their power to hurt us forever. Hang on! (PBC)

This example the Christians should follow. Have patience also you; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Patient endurance should be the keynote in the lives of the Christians. Times innumerable their hearts are on the verge of growing faint and of giving up the apparently unequal struggle. But with help from above they find themselves able again and again to strengthen and confirm their hearts. For that thought upholds them, that the coming of the Lord to Judgment is near, that His return means everlasting bliss for them. There is only a short time of waiting, and then the harvest will be gathered with joy ineffable. (Scaer)

The ESV has "Establish your hearts" or it can mean "strengthen your hearts"; confidence that comes from trust in the Lord (Ps.10:17). (TLSB)

**5:9** *Do not grumble.* James calls for patience toward believers as well as unbelievers (vv. 7–8). (CSB)

Not only should they avoid speaking against one another, but their less than fully articulated grumblings against each other are unacceptable. The groaning and moaning really consisted of statements of judgment against one another. They were putting themselves in the place of God, the Judge, to whom alone the right of passing judgment belongs. – We need each other! We need encouragement and guidance from our fellow Christians, not verbal abuse and gossip and judgmental criticism. (PBC)

*The Judge is standing at the door!* A reference to Christ's second coming (see vv. 7–8) and the judgment associated with it. The NT insistence on imminence (e.g., in Ro 13:12; Heb 10:25; 1Pe 4:7; Rev 22:20) arises from the teaching that the "last days" began with the incarnation. We have been living in the "last days" (v. 3) ever since (see note on Heb 1:1). The next great event in redemptive history is Christ's second coming. The NT does not say when it will take place, but its certainty is never questioned and believers are consistently admonished to watch for it. It was in this light that James expected the imminent return of Christ. – This means that he is now ready to enter into the world to exercise judgment. (CSB)

Jesus' return is at hand and can occur at any time (Mk 13:32–37). The Lord may judge here and now, but certainly also on the Last Day. (TLSB)

**5:10-11** “The prophets,” “Job.” They also endured much. The pastors of the Church were seen by James as the successors to the prophets, bringing the message that God is at hand, ready to bring them relief. As Job was blessed in the end, so, too, is the Church in the parousia. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

**5:10** *example of suffering* – They like the prophets were afflicted by a (kakopatheia) melancholia, a type of agony which Luther identified as Anfechtung. It is not improbable that “prophets” here, as in Acts 13:1, refers to pastors or elders who now have been martyred and not to OT religious authorities. (Scaer)

They waited for God’s judgment rather than trying to enact it themselves. The condemnations they spoke were not their own words but God’s (cf 2Ch 36:16). (TLSB)

**5:11** *those blessed* – Any Christian who receives strength and patience from the Lord, including the prophets (v 10), Job (v 11), and James’s readers. (TLSB)

*remained steadfast* – Synonymous with “patient” in vv 7–8, 10. (TLSB)

*steadfastness of Job*. Not “patience.” Job was not patient (Job 3; 12:1–3; 16:1–3; 21:4), but he persevered (Job 1:20–22; 2:9–10; 13:15). This is the only place in the NT where Job is mentioned, though Job 5:13 is quoted in 1Co 3:19. (CSB)

*purpose of the Lord* – Goals and plans God has for His people; ultimately, eternal life (1:12). This purpose remains even when He permits suffering (v 10). (TLSB)

*compassionate and merciful* – Characteristics ascribed to Yahweh at the giving of the Ten Commandments. (TLSB)

**5:7–11** The return of Jesus in glory shapes the Christian life. Confidence in His return (vv 7–8) gives us a perspective on how we relate to one another (v 9) and our sufferings (v 10). God promises to remain with us and restore us to Himself (v 11). In our shortsighted, self-focused lives, we dwell on our own problems and try to deal with them ourselves. The quicker we get out of a mess, the better. But this is not God’s perspective. He looks at the true goal: eternal life with Him. Consequently, our sufferings can be borne with patience. He gives faith to sustain us through suffering and confidence to endure all things until He comes again. • Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Yet grant me patience as I wait on You. Amen. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Matthew 11:2-15

*Jesus and John the Baptist*

**2** Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” **4** 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. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” **7** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. **9** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I

**send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**

**11:2** *John heard in prison* – In prison, John heard about Jesus’ activities, and he was somewhat puzzled and confused. (PBC)

John the Baptist had been imprisoned by King Herod, Antipas about a year earlier. (TLSB)

*sent his disciples* – John wanted to verify the reports he had heard about Jesus. (TLSB)

**11:3** *the one who is to come* – The Messiah. (CSB)

John the Baptist had used images of judgment to describe the ministry of the One who was coming (3:10–12). Jesus seemed not to be living up to John’s expectations of the Coming One, a title for the Messiah. (TLSB)

John was troubled and unsure at this point. John was aware of the mighty works of mercy that Jesus was performing, but where were his acts of judgment? Even before he baptized Jesus, John described Jesus’ work in terms of an ax at the root of trees about to be cut down and as wielding a winnowing fork to separate the chaff from the wheat and to burn the chaff in unquenchable fire (see 3:19,12). But those acts of judgment had not taken place. And John, the special forerunner of the Messiah, was sitting in Herod’s prison. John was courageous man of God, but he had his human weaknesses. The prophet Elijah, to whom the Scriptures compare John, had his weak moments too. At one time he was convinced that his faithful ministry had been a failure, and he wanted to die. Do you suppose that there has ever been a man of God who has never had his doubts about himself and about at least some of the Lord’s promises? Would that not be expecting the impossible of anyone with sinful nature. (PBC)

Was the Baptist really asking his question for his own sake or merely for the sake of his disciples? This question has occupied interpreters over the centuries, and it is not unimportant. Indeed, it is related to the main point of the unit, and the issues deserves an answer in itself. The central thrust of this passage, however, emerges from the Lord’s reply to John and his claim that in his ministry of wonders and preaching good news, the promised renewal of all things is taking place. Yet there is a strange twist to Jesus’ answer. Even though the prophecies are coming true, Jesus’ ministry will have a paradoxical character that can cause one to stumble and fall away without the proper eyes to see and ears to hear. (CC p. 555)

“Are you the Coming One, or shall we expect another? Did the Baptist ask this question for his own sake or merely to assist his disciples in their understanding and faith? With the apparent exception of Tertullian, the church fathers and early commentators held that the Baptist could not possibly have entertained doubts about the identity of Jesus. Yet in terms of grammar, near context, and even the wider sweep of Scripture’s story, there is no compelling reason to reject the obvious senses of the text. Grammatically, it is John who is the subject of the verb “he said” in this verse. Further Jesus replies, “Go and announce to John...” (v-4). Finally, the closing beatitude is singular and in the first place refers to John himself. Grammatically, John has asked a question, and Jesus has answered him. (CC p.555-556)

In terms of the near context, the obvious must not be overlooked: John heard the deeds of Christ while he was in prison. John had announced that Jesus was the eschatological Judge, far mightier than John

himself and on the verge of wielding the winnowing fork of separation (3:11-12). But now John is in prison. (CC p. 556)

“Where was the thunder of judgment? Where was the rebuke of the wicked? Why this use of power over demons but not over evil men? Why did Jesus consort with them in their feasting? Why did he allow the prophet’s righteous wrath against sin to rot in Herod’s jail without a word of protest”? Could this possibly be the Messiah? Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. (CC p. 556)

Jesus’ teaching about the Baptist’s significance in the following periscope (11:7-15) will afford more opportunity to develop this theme, but let it be said here that this does not look like the reign of God! We should not even necessarily think in terms of John’s concern for his own personal welfare. John is the fiery prophet of the Lord, and he knows it. Just as he was taken aback, however, when the Lord came to receive his baptism (3:13-15), so is he here, as the judgment tarries and the forces of evil men are still so strong. John has heard of the works of the Christ, Jesus’ authoritative preaching and his deeds of gracious authority. What John has heard, however does not match the end-time message he himself has preached not what he himself is experiencing. (CC p. 556)

In terms of Scripture’s wider context, there are any number of parallels to John’s journey from faith to doubt and back to faith again. The disappointment and frustration of Moses (Ex. 5:22-23), Elijah (1 Kings 18-19), Jeremiah (Jer. 20:1-18), and others give ample support for the view that John sends his disciples to Jesus with a question that is truly his own. We need not conclude that John has lost all faith, and we can surely believe that his faith is strengthened by the answer that Jesus sends back to him. The question, nevertheless, is John’s own, and it is real. (CC p. 556)

*look for another* – *erchomenos* – The coming one. That is an appropriate phrase for Advent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

To say, then, that John had his doubts about Jesus as the Messiah is not to judge him as having rejected Jesus. Doubts may threaten faith, but they do not automatically rule it out or destroy it. It is significant to note what John did about his doubts. He took them to Jesus! When doubts of any kind assail our Christian faith, we too need to go to Jesus for reassurance. When we consider everything He endured for our sakes, everything He did to demonstrate His divine powers – His voluntary death and His victorious resurrection on the third day – we are reassured that we can rely on all His promises and trust Him to take us safely to Himself in heaven in His own good time. (PBC)

**11:4-6** Jesus’ answer in 11:4-6 exhibits a twofold character. On the one hand, his words offer the strongest “yes!” to the first part of the Baptist’s question. The deeds that Jesus has been performing are the long-expected signs of renewal and restoration in Israel. God is at work, establishing the new age of salvation! Physical infirmity signifies that the creation is a fallen and broken place because of man’s sin. OT prophecy, especially in Isaiah, promises that God would come to restore and to heal. Good news is being preached to the poor, as promised in Is. 61:1. The OT promises are being fulfilled in Jesus. The age of salvation is here; He is the One who was to come. (CC pp. 556-557)

On the other hand, Jesus’ words invite John to accept in faith the strangest of all paradoxes in the history of the world. (CC p. 557)

John the Baptist was the first person who had to learn this paradox, and since John, paradox of existence in an era of fulfillment that is nevertheless short of the consummation has had to be learned by the apostles, by the members of Matthew’s church and by each Christian of every generation.” Hagner, *Matthew* 1:302 (CC p. 557)

The reign of God has broken into history in the person of Jesus, and he is the Coming One. But the power of evil men remains strong, and Christ will not overthrow that evil – yet. Jesus has come to save his people from their sins (1:21), yet he teaches his followers to expect opposition and hatred (10:24-39). God has come to rule and restore through this Jesus, and through him alone. But only God can reveal to people the knowledge of Jesus’ identity, and many will be caused to fall into unbelief because of Jesus and his hidden ways of revealing God’s reign. (CC p. 557)

**11:4** *go tell John what you hear and see.* Isaiah 42:3 “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice”

**11:5** *the good news is preached to them* – Jesus pointed to His mighty works of healing (chs 8–9) and His proclamation of the Good News to the poor as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s messianic prophecies (cf Is 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:18; 61:1–2). These words and deeds verified that He was the promised Christ. (TLSB)

They were also the very works that Isaiah the prophet had foretold of the Messiah (see Isaiah 35:5,6). The same prophet (61:1) had promised that the poor in spirit would be evangelized. Jesus had opened His most famous sermon by declaring, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). (PBC)

**11:6** *Blessed* – Jesus’ beatitude (cf. 5:3-12) promised spiritual tranquility to John and anyone else who was not repelled by Him. (TLSB)

*who is not fall offended by me* – To the Baptist and to all hearers since Jesus uttered these words, his final saying reaches out, inviting to faith and discipleship: “Blessed is the one who is not caused to stumble because of me!” (the literal Greek order of 11:6). One can easily imagine that John, in prison and poor in spirit, heard the Lord’s message as truly good news filled with salvation and hope. Believers today, who struggle in the paradox of salvation already won and salvation not yet fully experienced, can hear Jesus’ invitation and, not stumbling over Him, rejoice in God’s gracious and hidden reign in the Savior. (CC p. 557)

St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “The Lord intimated He was about to die, and by such a death as might be to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (SLSB, p. 174). (TLSB)

To not be captured in a trap. A stumbling block. To the religious leaders of that day, Jesus was the stone over which they tripped. – Jesus described the poor in spirit when He said, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” John the Baptist in prison may have been in danger of falling away. Jesus reminded him of the blessings in store for anyone who would remain faithful unto death – the crown of everlasting life! With that goal before him, John would be able to persevere. (PBC)

**11:7-15** God, the Father of the Lord Jesus, is a “historical” God. What I mean by this is that God has always engaged His creation by coming down into it with deeds – deeds of judgment and/or salvation. Jesus teaches that in the ministry of John the Baptist, God was doing a new thing; a new time has dawned in the world. Unless Jesus’ hearers would understand and recognize the significance of John, they would not be able to know what God the King was now doing, and most stunningly, how the creation’s King had condescended to rule among Israel in Jesus. (CC p. 563))

The structure of Jesus’ teaching in 11:7-15 can be laid out as follows. Three rhetorical questions (11:7-9) invite Jesus’ hearers to consider what they had gone out to see when so many of them had responded to

John's ministry. Jesus then provides the correct understanding of John and 11:10 is the heart of the teaching: John is the one prophesied in Mal. 3:1! (CC p. 563)

**11:7-9** Jesus' teaching begins to engage the crowds who have been following him by setting before them a thrice-repeated questions: "What did you go out into the desert to see?" The Messiah offers three possible answers, none of which is satisfactory. (CC p. 564)

Jesus had established who He was. He now asks the same rhetorical question three times to explain John's mission. Each moves closer to the purpose described in Mal 3:1 (cf Mt 11:10). (TLSB)

**11:7 concerning John** – Before John's disciples were out of earshot, Jesus addressed the assembled crowd with word that would also reassure those disciple. He reminded the people of John's ministry and how they had responded to it. Usually prophets would have to go where the people were if the were to get a hearing. In John's case, the people flocked out to him, even though he was out in the wilderness along the Jordan River. If he had been an unstable character, like the reeds along the riverbank that would sway back and forth in every breeze, not many would have bothered to go and hear him. (PBC)

*a reed shaken by the wind* – That is, fickle, accommodating, or weak in his ministry? No, John stood strong against all winds: he was willing to proclaim God's words against the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 3:7-10) and even risk the anger of Herod Antipas because of his preaching and was imprisoned as a result (4:12; 14:3)! (CC p. 564)

**11:8 man dressed in soft clothes** –The second hypothetical answer Christ supplies is likely intended as sarcasm or irony. Was John a man dressed in the soft clothing of a wealthy person? No, such people live in the houses of kings, while John is languishing in a king's prison. In a way, yes. Even to acknowledge John as Yahweh's prophet, however, is to come short of grasping the significance of John, his ministry, and the times that have come upon Israel and the world. For John is someone even greater than a prophet. (CC p. 564)

John's ascetic garb of camel's hair and leather belt were hardly the silk garments of noble courtiers. (TLSB)

**11:9 more than a prophet** – John surpassed all other prophets because he was God's chosen messenger, specifically identified as such in the OT, to prepare the way for the Messiah (v 10). He played a unique role in God's plan of salvation. (TLSB)

He was a prophet who had himself been prophesied about by Isaiah and Malachi. He was the prophet who bridged the gap between the OT and the NT. Unlike all the OT prophets, who could speak only of a Messiah who would appear sometime in the distant future, John had prepared the way for the Savior (PBC).

**11:10 before your face...prepare your way** – Both John and Jesus have proclaimed, "The reign of heaven stands near!" (3:2; 4:17). John is more than a prophet; he himself was the subject of end-time prophesy. Therefore his ministry signifies that the decisive moment in the history of salvation – indeed, in the history of the world – has begun. (CC pp. 565-566)

**11:11 truly I say to you** – To underscore and teach further, Jesus adds His "amen" (aman) statement: "truly I say to you." Here Jesus emphasizes that John has brought the time of prophecy to an end; the Baptizer has, so to speak, one foot in the old era even as it concludes. From the point of view of God's people who still lived by the promises in the old covenant, John the Baptist is the greatest man ever born of a woman. (CC p. 566)

*who is the least* – But the new deed of salvation, not that God has begun to reign in Jesus, is so wondrous that even the least person who by faith now comes under that reign of blessing can be regarded as greater than John! (CC p. 566)

Jesus here affirms that those who believe in him receive the blessings of the reign of heaven already now during their earthly lives; he is not only speaking about the blessedness of believers in the future life to come (contra Yamasaki, *John the Baptist*, 113-114). The whole punch of 11:11 depends on the change in salvation history that has happened with the pivotal figure of John the Baptist. The “least in the reign of heaven” refers to any disciple of Jesus. It does not refer to Jesus himself (*Homilies on Matthew*, 37:3 [NPNF 10:244-245]). (CC p. 566)

Even the newest, most timid believing disciple is greater than John – not because of anything in himself, but because the forgiveness and power and new life of the reign of God have come to and encompassed him. (CC p. 566)

*greater than he*. John belonged to the age of the old covenant, which was preparatory to Christ. The least NT saint has a higher privilege in Christ as a part of his bride (the church, Eph 5:25–27, 32) than John the Baptist, who was only a friend of the bridegroom (Jn 3:29). Another view, however, stresses the expression “he who is least,” holding that the key to its meaning is found in 18:4—“whoever humbles himself like this child.” Such a person, though “least,” is regarded by God as even greater than John the Baptist. (CSB)

**11:12 but** – (only found in Greek original) – As Jesus’ teaching about the Baptist continues in 11:12, the flexible little word *de*’ actually indicates a dramatic contrast with the prior verse. If 11:11 places John with one foot in the time of prophecy as yet unfulfilled, Jesus now in 11:12 locates the other foot of John in the era of end-time fulfillment when God’s reign is active on the earth. How shocking it must have been, then for Jesus to say what he now pronounces about God’s ruling deeds. In some incomprehensible fashion, God’s eschatological reign can be resisted; in truth evil men can make God’s deeds to be of no effect, at least in some sense. (CC pp. 566-567)

*kingdom of heaven has suffered violence* – John experienced violence; Jesus and His disciples expected violent opposition as they carried out their mission (ch 10). (TLSB)

To be sure, God’s ultimate purposes in Jesus will prevail. But Jesus now reveals that in him, God is reigning in a hidden, lowly, resistible fashion. John, the forerunner of the reign and of him in whom God is reigning, is the prime example. Herod Antipas, that violent man, has arrested John, and soon John will be executed. As the unfolding narrative of Matthew’s Gospel now will begin to emphasize, Jesus himself will increasingly meet with opposition and unbelief, calling forth his condemnation of the places to which he has gone but where no repentance and faith in him have resulted from his gracious ministry (11:16-24). Soon Matthew will narrate that the Pharisees who opposed Jesus in Galilee have determined to destroy him (12:14). And on one obvious level, the desires of Israel’s religious leaders to eliminate Jesus will come to fruition, in league with the power of Rome. Jesus will die the shameful death of crucifixion. (CC p. 567)

*violent take it by force* – They enter the kingdom and become Christ’s disciples. To do this takes spiritual courage, vigor, power and determination because of ever-present persecution. (CSB)

Jesus went on to point out the great significance of John’s ministry for the kingdom of God. Beginning with the powerful preaching of John, God’s kingdom was moving relentlessly onward. As they heard John and Jesus calling them to repentance, many common people, publicans, sinner, harlots, and others

were brought to repentance and were storming into the kingdom. Martin Luther observed, “Men whose consciences have been aroused, when they hear the gospel, press upon it, so that they cannot be stopped.” Nor could Satan and all his evil henchmen prevent Jesus from gaining the victory over them, a victory accomplished by his sacrificial death and demonstrated by his glorious resurrection. Finally, when Jesus comes again, every knee will be compelled to bow before Him, go the glory of God the Father. (PBC)

**11:13** *for* – (gar) John is no mere prophetic messenger. He is the one who fulfills Mal. 3:1! Moreover, the times in which John (and Jesus) are ministering are no ordinary times; they are the days in which the time of OT prophecy has come to an end, as Jesus now explains (gar) in 11:13-14. John stands astride the ages, in a sense. The OT’s prophetic voice rang out until the arrival of John and Jesus. Now the new times of fulfillment have begun, and God’s royal rule is being established in Israel and in the world. Jesus’ proclamation of good news to the poor and miracles of creation-restoration mean that God is reigning in a new way. Most importantly, Jesus himself is “God is with us” (1:23), the end-time Anointed Deliverer and Savior. (CC pp. 567-568)

OT era, with its writings that foretold the coming of both John and Jesus, had come to an end. (TLSB)

**11:14** *he is Elijah* – He was not the OT prophet Elijah raised from the dead; he was the second Elijah. He was like Elijah in forcefulness and courage. Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord had promised, “I will send you the prophet Elijah” (Malachi 4:5), and the Lord’s angel had told the priest Zechariah that his son John the Baptist, would “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Now, Jesus says, these prophesies have been fulfilled. John is this second Elijah. (PBC)

Malachi had predicted that a prophet like Elijah would come “before the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Mal 4:5). John the Baptist was that prophet. (TLSB)

**11:15** *has ears let him hear* – This warns that anyone who has ears to hear this message had better pay attention to it. The Savior to whom John pointed is the only Savior sinners will ever have. (PBC)

He says this because in His wisdom, God has come to reign in a way that will not look right to normal human perception. Is there power in the reign of God in Jesus? Yes – but it is power for those in need who repent and believe, and not power to overthrow violent men. (CC p. 568)

Outwardly hearing what Jesus said about himself and John was not sufficient. Real hearing called for faith, something that Jesus’ contemporaries lacked (vv. 15-24). (TLSB)