

# The Mirage Shall Become A Pool

D. M. Lloyd-Jones

## I.

In the Authorised Version, the statement of Isaiah 35:7 which we are considering reads like this, “And the parched ground shall become a pool.” In the Revised Version we find, “The glowing sand shall become a pool.” But I think it is generally agreed that the best translation of all is the one which is suggested in the margin of the Revised Version, where you find, “And the mirage shall become a pool.”

In the whole of chapter 35, the prophet Isaiah is giving a preview of some of the glorious results of the coming of Christ and His gospel and the great salvation which He shall bring. He describes it all with his wonderful, picturesque imagery. “He will come and save you,” says the Prophet, or “He Himself will come and save you,” and the result of His coming will be that “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the mirage shall become a pool.”

This is a very typical and characteristic Old Testament way of looking at life. It is a typical Eastern way of looking at life. The Easterner, as we find not only in the Bible but in other literature, very naturally and instinctively viewed life as a great journey. Many of them were nomadic people, and most of them were agricultural people; and they were accustomed to taking journeys. Not at all infrequently it happened that they had to cross a desert and wilderness which was not only trackless but also, and this was much more serious, without water. There was no experience to which the typical Easterner was more accustomed than just that of travelling through the desert with the broiling sun beating upon his head, making for a destination but never seeming to arrive, beginning to feel tired and weary, suffering from a terrible thirst, longing for some water to try to slake his thirst, to revive his drooping spirits, to give him new energy and fresh power. As he thus went across the desert, the trackless sandy waste with the sun beating down upon him, ever and anon he saw a marvellous pool of water. It quickened his heart and he said to himself, “I have only to arrive there and I shall find all the water I need—I shall be able to rest in that oasis and satisfy my every want and then go on with the journey.” But, alas, when he arrived at that point he found nothing there but glowing sand—there was no water.

That is what is meant by a mirage; it is one of those peculiar natural phenomena that are found in desert places—the sun shining upon the sand in such a way and in such a manner as to give the appearance of a sheet of water; but there is no water there. It is mere appearance, so that when you arrive at that spot there is no water, it is a mirage, it is an illusion. Then the traveller has to continue on his journey, until again he sees another amazing sheet of water. Again he is filled with gratitude, but on arriving at that point once more he has the same experience, just a mirage—no water. On and on he goes, deluded by mirage after mirage. That is one of the distressing things about journeying through deserts and trackless wildernesses.

Now that is the picture we have in our text and the teaching of the Bible is that life is like that. That is the very essence of the teaching both of the Old Testament and the New. The Bible tells us that our lives in this world are nothing but a *journey*, a *pilgrimage*. There is nothing that is so typical of the biblical language as just that idea of life, arising, as I say, very naturally from Eastern conditions. Man, according to the Bible, is like one taking a journey; he enters into this world and he is making for a destination; he is a pilgrim, he is a sojourner. Those are the terms—he is a traveller.

You find the same idea in the hymns. There is nothing so common in the hymn books as this self-same picture of life. But the Bible does not stop at that; it tells us that man as he goes through this journey called life is constantly experiencing what the Easterner so constantly experienced in his literal, physical journey through the actual wilderness or desert. We haven't gone very far in this life and world, according to the Bible, before we begin to feel a little tired. We may have started out in life with rose-coloured spectacles on,

and everything was going to be perfectly beautiful and wonderful. We may have thought there were no real problems—we have all passed through some such stage as that. But we haven't gone very far before we have found that life has its problems and its difficulties, and we begin to know what it is to be tired and what it is to be weary. We have all known what it is to long for satisfaction. We are all looking for something, and as we go along, according to the Bible, we are constantly seeing these appearances of water and of supply. But its ultimate message is that they all prove to be nothing but a mirage, apart from the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## II.

There are certain things for which everybody is looking. Let me just mention some of them. Everybody is looking for *peace*, and for *joy*; everybody wants *happiness*. We all look for life in a real sense, life worthy of the name. The life we are all looking for is life with certain satisfactions and with certain securities. These are the things we are looking for. We are here in the wilderness, in the desert—we do not need to argue about that, it is fact. In this journey we look for certain things because of our experiences, because of our needs, because of our tiredness. We are looking for something to give us *rest*, *relief*, *power* and *life*. Now in that situation we are confronted by two possibilities. There is the offer made by the world itself, and by life outside of God and outside of Christ; and on the other hand is the great offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us consider these two possibilities.

The world is constantly offering us these very satisfactions that we need. The world is catering for man as he is today. The world in many different ways is assuring us that if we only listen to and accept its message we shall obtain the very things we want. How does it do so? I have no time to give you an exhaustive list, but let me mention some of the ways in which men are trying to find these satisfactions, and the ways in which the world is offering them.

Take first the idea of pleasures—entertainments. There are large numbers who seem to believe quite seriously that everything that is needed in life can be obtained in that way. They live for one round of pleasure after another—reading novels, drinking, dancing, gambling, looking at films and football matches. Such are some of the offers the world makes to enable us to get rid of our troubles and problems and difficulties. The whole life of pleasure and entertainment, as it is so highly organized at the present time, is based on that supposition. You cannot read your morning newspaper without seeing that. People are seeking satisfaction in that way and they believe that the world can really satisfy them along those lines.

To others it is the possession of wealth. They believe if they get money they will be able to buy happiness and pleasure. They seem to think that the royal protection against all ills is an economic one, that if only that can be settled (I am not only thinking of those who are wealthy in the customary sense, but those who pin their faith to an economic solution) they will have everything that they need and everything that can be desired. That becomes their main end and object in life and in existence.

Others say that that is not the way to obtain satisfaction. The way to satisfaction and happiness is through learning, intellectual interests—art, music, philosophy, studying problems, debating and discussing—an intellectual life. “There,” they say, “if you only accept it and give yourself to it, you will ultimately find all the satisfaction you need.”

There are many who are seeking it in marriage. There are many who are seeking it in family life. The whole life of many people in this country today is lived within the limits of the family. That is everything to them and there they find a temporary satisfaction. That has become the whole of life to them, and they give themselves to the family and are confident that that is the way to live and enjoy life and to get ultimate satisfaction.

But there are those who, having tried all these things and having found them wanting, are firmly convinced that what they need is a change. Given a change of environment and circumstances, a new start, a new beginning, all will be well. This is just a more or less philosophical way of explaining so much of what is happening in this modern world. Have you seen the phenomenal increase in the lists in the divorce courts?

What does it mean? This is the philosophy. Here is a person travelling through life in this world feeling tired and miserable and unhappy. He wants to be happy, she wants to be happy. What is to be done? Suddenly they see a hope, an oasis, an appearance in the desert. What does it say? It says, "Make a new start, break this particular engagement you are in at the moment, get out of that marriage relationship, make a fresh one and there you will find happiness." That is the real meaning of it. They are confident that if this first marriage is broken and another is started all is going to be well—that is the explanation.

Others believe that if they just leave this country and go to another country, there they will find it. But I need not elaborate. Am I not stating the solemn facts concerning life today? "What I need is a new beginning, a new job,—all my troubles are due to the situation I am in. If only I could have a new beginning, a new marriage, a new country, a new job, something new—there it is away in the distance, if only I could get there I should have complete satisfaction." That is the outlook.

Then think of it on a larger and wider scale, in terms of the faith of mankind always in new ideas. The history of the world in a sense is just the history of man clinging desperately to new hopes and ideas, believing that if only this new thing can be put into practice, all his problems will be solved. You see it happening in the realm of the individual and in the realm of nations, and in the realm of the world at large. Some fifty years ago we said we really were fighting the last war, a war to end war. We pinned our faith to the League of Nations and various other things—new ideas, new hopes springing from new thoughts and ideas.

Think, too, of the way in which mankind so often believes that an improvement in social conditions, some political action, is really going to change everything. Isn't it rather sad today to read some of the poets of the mid-Victorian period, but still sadder to read the statements of the statesmen and politicians during the last sixty years! How certain they were that if only certain things were done in Westminster, paradise would be achieved—if only, if only—then all would be well.

I have hurriedly reminded you of some of the ways in which men and women, individually and collectively, are made to believe by the world that their needs can all be answered and satisfied. We are all, I say, in the journey; we are all aware of this feeling of fatigue and tiredness and of dissatisfaction; and we have all seen these things that are offered to us there in the future. But isn't the Bible stating the simple truth when it tells us that it always proves to be nothing but a mirage? Isn't this the case in the life of the individual? Isn't it a fact in the life of the world generally? Looking back in your history books, looking at biographies, looking at the history of man, don't you find that all along it has just proved to be a mirage! Haven't you observed that people who break their first marriage tend to break the second and the third? Why? Because it is the same prophecy—it is a mirage always. Some of the greatest tragedies in the world today are due to the fact that men and women fail to realize this principle.

Let me take a case on a perfectly moral level. Look at that little family living to itself and for itself, with never a thought about God and the soul and eternity. It seems to be ideally and idyllically happy—they are living a family life for themselves, everything centered there. You say they have found happiness, they have found satisfaction. But I suddenly see the mother of that family being stricken by illness, I see her undergoing an operation, I hear of her sudden death. And everything on which their happiness had been built has gone—it was a mirage. That is but one illustration of what happens in all these other respects. Do men and women really find satisfaction in pleasure? Is peace to be found there? Can all these other things really satisfy and give us what we need? Is the world happy? Well, the answer is just look at the world, and to read the reports which we have of the world in the daily newspapers—it is a mirage. The thing for which we are looking seems to be there, but when we arrive it is not there. Again we see another, and on and on we go, deluded, bewildered, mocked by mirages—the thing we seem to be grasping, for ever escaping us and eluding us.

### III.

Now the vital question for us to consider is this—what is the explanation of it? I merely want to suggest a few answers. Here, surely, are the real explanations of why all that must inevitably fail.

The first reason is that *it is all based on the assumption that we ourselves are all right and that the real trouble lies in somebody else or in our circumstances, or conditions.*

The assumption of the world is that we ourselves are all right, it is some other person, it is our work, it is our environment, it is the world that causes the trouble. If only I can be given a chance, then all is going to be well. The world comforts me along that line and assures me that I, myself, am essentially right. I only need a change in circumstances and conditions. That is the first assumption.

The second error of which this attitude is guilty is that *it always fails to treat the whole man and only treats a part of us.*

It only treats a section of our lives. There are certain things that appeal to the intellect only—they can be wonderful as intellectual interests, but man has a heart, and a soul, and a mind. There are other things that only appeal to the emotions, and yet man is not only a creature of sentiment. Man needs intellectual satisfaction, and if he thinks at all, he sees there is no intellectual satisfaction there. Man has been made by God, body, soul and spirit, and he desires satisfaction in the three realms; and if he does not satisfy the three, he will remain restless and unhappy. He will be living an unsatisfied life and he will feel like a traveller in the desert mocked by succeeding mirages. It is a piece-meal view of life which does not deal with man as a whole.

But of course the ultimate error with all these worldly ways of getting satisfaction is that *they leave out the most vital factor of all, which is our relationship to God.*

Work, marriage, family—all these other things—they are all right as far as they go; but God has made us, and He so made us that without Him we can never finally be happy. We must agree with the remark of the great Augustine who said, “Thou hast made us for Thyself and our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” You may try to disagree with that, but I solemnly assure you that until you are right with God, you can travel to the ends of the earth, you can indulge your intellect, your emotion, you can try anything and everything, but you will never find happiness and peace, you will never know real life and joy—it is impossible. Man is made by God and he can never escape Him. He can travel to the North or the South, he can ascend into the heavens or go down into the deeps, but until he is right with God he will never know satisfaction. The world at its best and in its most attractive form today leaves out God, and because God is left out, what it has to offer is nothing but a mirage.

Now, before I go any further, I make no apology for putting a simple question to you. Where have you arrived in your journey? How do you feel about your life—have you found satisfaction; have you found peace; is all well with your soul; are you happy; do you know where you stand; have you really got that for which you are looking and seeking and searching? I say that the teaching of the Bible, which is confirmed by the life of every man and woman who is prepared to be honest, is that everything the world offers us proves to be nothing but an illusion, a mirage. We always seem to be getting there, but we never arrive.

“Very well,” says someone, “is there no hope for us, is life to be nothing but a succession of mirages, are we just to go on being disappointed, is there nothing left but to die and get out of it all?” Thank God for our text. Here is the answer, and it is my privilege to remind you of it. “The mirage shall become a pool.” The thing you see is going to be real; it is not an appearance, it is actually going to happen. The first claim of the gospel is that it really does do for us and supply to us the very things we need. “The mirage shall become a pool.” How does it do it?

Well, the gospel does it like this. *It starts by making us understand the real nature of life.* The gospel, in other words, is the exact opposite of everything I have been trying to say. The first thing the Bible does is to make a man take a serious view of life; it makes a man see himself. It reminds us quite simply of the fact we

constantly forget that we have all started in life and we have all to end it. The gospel just starts there. It makes us see the real nature of life as a journey, a travelling, a pilgrimage. It gets rid of all those superficialities—the brightness and the glitter of it all—and it says, “Man, you are here today but you may not be here tomorrow. That is life—now start from there.” It tells us we have within us an immortal soul and spirit which goes on beyond death and the grave into eternity.

Then *it brings us immediately and directly to Christ*. That is the very essence of the gospel. The gospel does not in the first instance ask us to make any new resolutions. It is the world that does that. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not an appeal to us to start living a better life because it is the first Sunday of a new year. The gospel of Jesus Christ only asks you to do one thing and that is to come to Christ and to submit to Him.

Now let me tell you why the gospel does not ask you to make new year resolutions. I am going to quote some words written by the great Dr. Samuel Johnson. This is what he says: “I have now spent fifty-five years in resolving, having, from the earliest time almost that I can remember, been forming schemes of a better life. I have done nothing. The need of doing, therefore, is passing, since the time of doing is short.” What an honest confession! And what was true of Dr. Johnson has been true of all. We have all made our new year resolutions; how often have we decided to be better, but we are not better! Well, the gospel tells us that it cannot be done that way.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is something entirely different, it pictures us in the desert with the sun blazing upon us. We are all tired and weary and exhausted; we have been running after mirages. We have tried pleasures and we have had our fill. They have taken something out of us and have left us empty. We have searched here and there; we are staggering in this desert called life. What is the use of asking such a person to make a new year resolution? What is the use of asking such a man suddenly to climb a mountain? What is the use of asking such a man to be perfect? We cannot do it—we are tired and weary. What we need is rest, peace, refreshment and a new life. And if I say nothing else may that be abundantly plain and clear; the gospel does not ask you to do anything in the first instance but just to come to Christ. There you are in the wilderness, in the desert; and there, I tell you, is the very thing you need. It is there in a Person. “But,” you say, “I have been deluded by mirages so often, isn’t this just another mirage?” My reply is, come to Him, and “the mirage shall become a pool”—this is different. It does not ask you to do something impossible; it assures you that He can give you everything you need, and how much more. It assures you that if you just come you will find it is the oasis it appears to be—that the blazing sand illusion has become a veritable pool.

How does Christ do this? He does it first of all *by putting me right with God*. I said just now that the trouble with all the other methods is that they forget God. The gospel starts there. The gospel reminds us that we are not only in this life and world, but that we are also facing God. Very well, the first problem is how can I be put right with God? The difficulty is that I have sinned against Him; I have deliberately forgotten Him; I have done things I know to be wrong; I have cursed God in so many ways; I have deliberately turned my back upon Him—how can I get right with Him? I cannot undo my past. What I have done, I have done. “What I have written, I have written.” I cannot undo my past, I cannot erase what I have written, I have blotted my book of life. How can I get right with God? There is only one answer, Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and when He went to that Cross He went there for you and for your sins. He has borne your sins; He has borne your guilt and punishment; He has died that death that you and I should be put right with God. The first essential thing, without which nothing can be put right, He has done, He has died for our sins; He puts us right with God.

But He not only puts us right with God, *He also puts us right*. He gives us a new nature, He gives us a new life. The gospel of Jesus Christ, I say again, is not an appeal to us to adopt a new moral, ethical code. Thank God, the gospel offers a new life—we can be born again, we can receive a new nature. This leads to a new outlook and to our being filled with new desires—we no longer desire the things we used to, and we desire things that are good. Beyond that it gives us power and strength to overcome; it enables us to defeat old enemies that have got us down through the long years of the past. It enables us to smile at foes, and to be more than conquerors in spite of them.

The gospel puts me right with God, it puts me right, and above all He, *Christ, satisfies my every need.* He never fails, He never changes—whatever I may need in this life Christ can give me, and He won't leave me in the hour of death. Look at these other things, death robs us of them—every one. Pleasure does not help you, philosophy does not help you. You see a dear one suddenly taken from you—what is the value of money and art and music and all other noble and excellent things? They do not help you when your heart is bleeding and when you seem to have lost everything in life and in this world. They have nothing to give you; but Christ is with us in life and He will be with us in death, He will be with us through the countless ages of eternity. There He is in the desert. He comes to meet you. He has entered into the world and He offers to give you tonight everything you need: rest, peace, satisfaction, happiness, joy, power and a hope that can never fade away. Everyone who has ever met Him in some way or another is just saying this:

*“Christ in Thee my soul hath found  
And found in Thee alone,  
The peace, the joy I sought so long,  
The bliss, till now unknown.*

*I sighed for rest and happiness,  
I yearned for them not Thee,  
But while I passed my Saviour by  
His love laid hold on me.*

*I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,  
But, ah, the waters failed,  
E'en as I stooped to drink they fled  
And mocked me as I wailed.*

*The pleasures lost I sadly mourned,  
But never wept for Thee,  
Till grace the sightless eyes received  
Thy loveliness to see.*

*Now, none but Christ can satisfy,  
None other name for me,  
There's love, and life and lasting joy,  
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.”*

“But is it really true?” asks someone. “Aren't you just standing there painting a wonderful picture? Isn't it just another message? Can I be sure that if I come to Him and believe your message and yield my life to Christ that He really will prove to be what I need? Will the mirage become a pool?” Let me answer you in the words of another hymn:

*“Finding, following, keeping, struggling,  
Is He sure to bless?  
Saints, Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs,  
Answer, Yes.”*

All who have ever come to Him and tried Him have ever found in Him full, complete, and final satisfaction.

My dear friends, the mirage shall become a pool at last—it really does happen when you seek it in Him. Amen.