**Isaiah 55:10-13** July 26, 2020

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 *Isaiah 55:10[The Lord declares,] “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. 12You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. 13Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**God’s Word Works
I. The Word Will Bear Fruit (Its Power)
II. What Those Fruits Look Like (Its Results)**

 A young man was mowing lawns. He knew what he was doing, but he hadn’t yet seen so many summers, so he was a little short on experience. There he was mowing and he couldn’t even tell where he had mown. It was frustrating. It had been ten days since the last time he mowed, and he still couldn’t tell if mowing was doing any good! Five days later the same person called him back to mow again. The young man thought, “I couldn’t see where I was mowing after 10 days, now this guy wants me back after 5 days. What’s the point?!” But this time the grass was thick and tall. What had happened? Fertilizer? Magic? No, rain. Before his 10 day mowing, it hadn’t rained at all. In the next 5 days it rained heavily, twice. Water is powerful! Water is life-giving! And if you have a lawn to mow, you wish, if anything, that water *weren’t* quite so life giving.

 But that’s the way things are. When it rains, things grow. It would be impossible for things not to grow. You can’t even imagine heavy summer rains and brown grass. Rain. Makes. Things. Grow. ALWAYS!

 Do you have that much confidence in God’s Word? Can you speak a word of God and *know* that it will work like rain from the heavens? Do you believe that it reliably, always gives life which you yourself just plain can’t?

 Listen to the way the Lord God said it through his prophet: ***“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty.”***

 God makes the claim, but does his word work? Nationally, church attendance has been declining for decades, especially when we remember that the population is growing. Fewer and fewer people seem to be interested in what God wants them to do when it comes to the big decisions of life. They don’t seem to be asking themselves, “What does God think about marriage and shacking up and divorce and all the sensual stuff out there?” In our ever more rootless society people don’t ask, “If I move to another place, what will I do for my spiritual well-being?” No. We are sure to look for the restaurants, movie theaters, and grocery stores months before PCSing/moving. But God’s house? “Meh. Once I’m settled down I’ll take a look.” When people approach the politics of the day—and here we are careful not to make politics an extension of religion—but when we approach the politics of our day, how often do we try to understand them within the framework of God’s will and word? How often do we inspect our own views on policy issues under the microscope of the Bible? People aren’t asking God these questions these days.

 In our Sunday Bible class we have been looking at the book *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up!* One week recently it gave a great example of the sort of thing I am trying to describe. There was a home Bible study group. One man had been offered a promotion with a very substantial pay raise and wondered if he should take it. The Christians around him more or less congratulated him and encouraged him to take it. They praised God for His blessings. But they never asked if this really was what God wanted him to do. They assumed that since it fit their definition of success, it was a blessing straight from heaven. Afterward, a guest at the Bible study took the man aside and asked, “Right now, are you able to pay the mortgage and put food on the table?” “Yes.” “Then you don’t really *need* more income.” “No.” “What would this job require?” “Quite a bit of travel.” “How does your wife feel about that?” “Not happy.” “How would this job affect your spiritual leadership in your young family?” “I would have a lot less time.” “Do you think taking this job would help your God-given responsibilities to your family?” Uneasy silence. God’s word is powerful.

 We sometimes wonder if God’s word has lost its relevance, its power for our day. Might I suggest that the reason we feel this way is not because God’s word isn’t powerful, but because we don’t speak God’s word! In that example, when someone finally did start to speak from God’s Word, it worked. That man started to make difficult decisions. There is nothing difficult about taking a promotion and a huge pay raise. There is something very difficult in realizing that maybe, *maybe*, God wants you to turn down that promotion and huge pay raise.

 How often have we muffled the power of God’s Word? When we see something happening in our sphere of influence—and here I am not talking about the endless noise of things out there—when we see something sketchy happening in *our own* sphere of influence, we have our misgivings. We worry about where this is going. But we do not speak up. As things go to pot, we wonder if God’s word has any power in these waning days of our fallen world. You know what? The reason God’s word apparently has no power is because it *hasn’t been spoken*.

 Oh, how often we need to repent! We have sat there and heard of the live-ins and kept our mouths shut, or maybe we voice a personal opinion, but are sure to not frame it as God’s decree. We have watched people drift away from participation at God’s house, and we in a friendly way invite them back—which is good and has its place—but we never make it clear this is not about us, but about what God wants. Do we let God speak?

 Now we start to feel the power of God’s Word in a way God did not first intend in Eden. It is Law. God’s Law points out sin and it hurts!

 If you go down to the new-ish Wal-Mart—the smaller one down at the corner of 31W and Joe Prather—right next to the walk-in entrance, there is the beginning of a hole in the concrete. The top smooth layer of cement has been worn off, and the cement between the rocks is beginning to wear away. From this small hole, look straight up the outside wall and you will see an eavestrough down spout not connected to anything. When it rains, the water pours through and falls on the cement beneath. Every morning the dew drip, drip, drips on the same place. This coming winter, water will gather and freeze, and will really get to work. It won’t take long. I’d rather someone throw a glass of water at me than a concrete block, but every concrete man will tell you that water is stronger than cement. God wants his word to give life, but sometimes his word has to do the painful work of a hammer, busting up hard hearts. That’s God’s Law.

 Lord God, be merciful to us! Your word is powerful. It’s power makes us afraid! Its power condemns our own sin. We are also afraid to speak its power to challenge people in their self-chosen ways. And we doubt the Gospel’s power to change hearts, to turn people to their Savior. So we gag God’s Word. We stuff a dirty rag in the Holy Spirit’s mouth. We think, “If I say that, what might happen? What might they think?” And let me add this: who has more to repent of in this area than a pastor whose job it is to speak!

 Thank God that while his Word speaks powerfully in Law and condemns sin, yes our sin, it also speaks powerfully in another language: the Gospel.

 The Gospel speaks even more powerfully of God’s forgiveness than the Law does of our condemnation. Most beautifully, the Gospel doesn’t just say you are forgiven. It puts the story of God’s forgiveness in front of you in full color 4K definition. His word tells you the story of God’s long wrought plan running the thousands of years from the first sin, to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for all sin. God’s word takes you to the cross, points to the suffering Jesus and says, “See, your Savior! Your sin really is paid for. You have nothing to fear.”

 In the Gospel, God’s word gives life. It is powerful! It takes people from the pits of despair and lifts them out, putting them on a rocky ledge high above the floodwaters. Somewhere the psalmist sings, *“He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand”* (Ps 40:2). Yes, that is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

 It is God’s will that all hear. It is God’s will that all believe. Yet when he speaks—and this is a mystery that we will not understand until the hereafter—God who said *“Let there be light,”* and also*, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years,”* and the universe obeyed, this almighty God has given our puny human wills the freedom to say “No” to his call. Yet our freedom does not change His desire for all to hear, for all to believe, for all to be saved.

 These words from Isaiah 55 focus not on the Law, but on the Gospel. ***“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow.”***

 When you hear these verses, you probably miss the point because you live in Kentucky where the hills are clothed with tall, green trees. You just think that big green trees grow everywhere. But neither God nor Isaiah had Kentucky in mind. They had Iraq in mind. (And some of you know what that looks like!) Yes, Iraq. While this stirring prophecy pictures the Messianic age, our A.D. age. It was painted on the canvas of the Israelites returning from their captivity in Babylon. And you know where ancient Babylon now is, right? Iraq. So God likened the Israelites’ desert trek back to the homeland of Israel to the results of people hearing the Gospel. In that desolate wilderness, what joy to imagine trees growing in place of thorns; instead of the foreboding dessert hills, hills bursting into song as they returned to their promised land.

 Of course hills don

’t really burst into song and trees don’t literally clap their hands. That’s silly! And yet we understand it perfectly. The fruit of the Gospel’s work is *“love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* When through faith in Jesus we are set at rest with God, it is as though all creation joins in the song of salvation. The troubles of life become bearable. The annoyances become amusing. We trust God there is a greater purpose at work. We look at others in the faith, and we count them brothers and sisters. We see unbelievers as people who desperately need to hear God’s life-giving word. And we have the privilege of telling them! The world is transformed by the Word of God. These are the fruits of God’s Word in our lives, when both the Law and the Gospel do their work.

 So, this week when you go to mow your lawn and complain, “I mowed it just five days ago!” Remember how God compared the life-giving power of rain to his own word and said, ***“So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”***

 **God’s Word Works!** It always bears fruit. It bears beautiful fruit. Read it. Hear it. Speak it. Unleash God’s power! Amen.