



Isaiah 55:10-13

Sexagesima, February 23, '25
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"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ¹² "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. ¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

I've always wanted to be one of those guys that you can rely on with no doubt that he'll be true to his word. One of those guys who lives by the motto, "My word is my bond,"—who takes his promises very seriously. One of those guys who truly believes, "A man is only as good as his word." I've always wanted to be that type of guy, the type of guy a person can trust—whose word a person can rely on.

The truth is, I talk way too much for my words to be worth almost anything at all. I talk a lot without *really even thinking* about what I'm saying before I say it. I've been known to exaggerate—I live *more* by the motto of, "Don't let the truth get in the way of a good story." I make a lot of promises, and it's not that I don't intend to keep those promises, it's just that I make so many that I can't remember them all. Sometimes my boys will remind me of something I promised—"but you *said* we could,"—and then I will try to stay true to my word, although it wasn't much of a promise if I forgot it. Other times I will *remember* what I promised and be relieved when my boys *don't* remember—and I won't bring it up. Yes, like I said, *my word* isn't worth very much at all.

I'm thankful then that what I get to preach out of this pulpit isn't *my word*. It's God's Word! And unlike *my word*, *God's Word* is worth a whole lot. Our theme this morning is *not* that "God is only as good as His Word," but rather:

The Word is "Only" as Good as God

- I. It's good and effective *for* you
- II. It's good and effective *through* you

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." I'd guess that many of you memorized those two verses, Isaiah 55:10-11, back when you were in confirmation. You probably memorized those verses and recited them back to your pastor. And if your pastor was like me, the conversation around those two verses probably went something like this:

"Remember creation? God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. Then God said, 'Let there be a firmament to divide the waters from the waters,' and it was so! Then God said, 'Let the waters be gathered to one place, and let the dry land appear,' and it was so. On each day of creation, God spoke, and it happened just as He said." And then I usually hit the fast-forward button, and jump to the New Testament and say, "And when Jesus said to the paralyzed man, 'Rise, take up your bed, and

walk,' the man rose, took up his bed, and walked straight back to his house. And when Jesus said, 'Lazarus, come out,' Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, walked right out of the tomb." And then I hit the fast-forward button to jump to the current day, and I say something like, "And when Jesus says to you that your sins are forgiven, it is just as He says. When Jesus gives you bread and wine and says, 'Take, eat, this is My body,' 'Drink of it all of you, this is the new covenant in my blood,' it is just as He says it is. God's Word is powerful and effective; it simply does what it says."

And all of that is true, that *is* the effect of God's Word. It *does* do exactly as it says. And that *is* what our sermon text is telling us this morning. *However*, there's even more here. Because our text isn't *just* Isaiah 55:10-11, it's also Isaiah 55:12-13, and *those* verses are not verses that I was forced to memorize back when I was in confirmation class. Those verses say, ***"For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."***

All of these verses go together, and when you read verses 12 and 13, you start to get the idea that there might be some context behind verses 10 and 11 that we know so well. Here's the context: when Isaiah declares that God's Word is powerful and effective, as effective as the rain which comes down from heaven, he's actually referencing a specific Word addressed to God's people at a specific time.

He's addressing the people of Israel that were stuck in captivity in a foreign nation, namely Babylon. They had been taken from their homes, their temple had been burned, their way of life had been robbed of them, even their *names* were replaced with Babylonian names. Instead of the Jordan river, they were stuck between the Tigris and the Euphrates; instead of the throne of David, they were ruled by the throne of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar; instead of the temple of the LORD overshadowing them, there was instead the ziggurat to Marduk, the god of the Babylonians.

And the Babylonian propaganda machine made sure that the Judean people stuck in captivity *knew* that Babylon's god was stronger than the God of Israel. Laws were put into place—if you prayed to any power but the king, you'd be thrown into a lion's den; if you did not bow down and worship the golden statue of the king, you'd be burned alive in a fiery furnace. This was the story that many were led to believe: the LORD had abandoned them, and there was no return—no going back.

So, God gave these people His Word—words spoken through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah that this was *not* the end of the story. He gave His Word that He would deliver them, that they *would* return home! The LORD was more powerful than Babylon's *imagined* god, and this would happen because *the God of Israel* said so—had given His Word. And **God's Word is "Only" as Good as God.**

So, in the last half of his book, Isaiah speaks that Word of God to the people of Israel, speaking words of comfort to them, that their warfare was over and that their iniquity had been pardoned. (cf. 40:1-11) God's Word to them was that the LORD would break those bronze doors and those bars of iron that held them in, and He would do so by raising up an opposing leader—Cyrus, by name. (cf. 45:1-7) God's Word to them was that they would return, and not only them, the LORD would even bring people from North, South, East, and West—He would gather people from every nation on earth to be

the true Israel of God. (cf. 43:1-7) This was because the LORD had determined it to be too small a thing to redeem only the descendants of *Jacob* stuck in Babylon, He wanted His Word of salvation to be broadcast to every nation. (cf. 49:1-7) He would do so through His Suffering Servant who would establish justice in all the earth. (cf. 42:1-9) And His Suffering Servant would deliver them and establish justice in the most unfathomable way—He would be despised and rejected, a man acquainted with grief; He would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities; He would be led like a lamb to the slaughter, and yet like a sheep before its shearers is silent He would open not His mouth. And by *His* wounds, the world would be healed. (cf. 52:13-53:12)

And after *all of this*, the bookend to all of this Word from God is our text this morning. God promises them that His Word is not empty. It would accomplish the purpose for which He sent it; it would succeed. ***“You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace...”*** Now, these words were given to them about one-hundred years before Babylon ever even led the first captive away. And after they were in Babylon, it was another seventy years before they were freed. That’s 170 years of waiting for even the beginning of the fulfillment of this Word from God. That’s a lot of waiting. But *some*, while they waited, held onto these Words. They waited, and they trusted this Word from God.

And *eventually*, God’s Word was fulfilled. One Cyrus rose as up as the King of the Persians; he broke down those bronze doors and iron bars, and Israel was freed. And the people *did* return. The LORD had given them His Word, and **His Word is as Good as He is**. It is not empty; it succeeds. His Word was fulfilled, just not in *completion*. Just like the exiles in Babylon, those who returned to their homes still had to wait for a while for *some* of these things—they had to wait and trust this Word from God.

And then, eventually, after 500 more years of waiting, that Suffering Servant came! He came, and His own people despised Him! He was led like a Lamb to the slaughter. His grave was made with the wicked as He was crushed, as He was pierced, as He was wounded to death. And thus healing came; peace came; sins were carried away. It happened just as God had said in His Word, *because* God had given His Word. And His Word is not empty; it succeeds.

And then later, a *little* while later, that Word of salvation went out to the nations, began to spread to the nations—East, West, North, and South. And that Word has continued to find its fulfillment down to this very day, where an ocean away, in this very sanctuary, that powerful and effective Word is being broadcast to *us*, because it was too small a thing to redeem only the descendants of Jacob.

When God first speaks these words to the exiles, He doesn’t want them to forget. He wants them to *remember* His Word, to *trust* His Word, to know that He has not rejected them forever. He has not forsaken them forever—they *will* return. And we listening in on this Word today can look back at history and confirm that they *did* return, because *God* is faithful. His Word does not return to Him empty, it accomplishes the purposes for which He sends it out. It succeeds.

And that same powerful God whose **Word is as Good as He Is**, has now spoken to you. He speaks **His good and effective Word for you**. He tells you today that your sins are forgiven. He tells you today that this bread and wine are not *only* bread and wine, but also His very body and blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins. He tells you today that even if you find yourself in bondage, in captivity, you are not alone! He is with you, and you will ultimately be released from these pains

because you have a share in His salvation. He tells you today that you are just a stranger here on this earth, but that your real country is heaven—and He will come to take you there.

Now, *some* of these things are true right now, today. *Some* of these things, you might have to wait a while for, just as Israel had to wait. But you can wait holding on to God’s Word which He has given you. It is not empty; it succeeds. And so, *as* we wait, we remember God’s promises. We *look ahead* to the day when our Lord will come again. And what a day that will be. Looking at our text, and seeing all the descriptions in the last two verses, I don’t *think* when those exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem—I doubt that the hills and the mountains were singing. I doubt that the trees were clapping their hands or that new growth was just bursting out of thorns and thistles.

But Jesus *is* coming back on the last day to fulfill His promises to you, and on *that* day all things will be made new. (cf. Revelation 21:5) Who knows? Perhaps trees will suddenly be sprouting out of the ground, just as they did on the third day of creation. For all we know, maybe the hills and the mountains really *will* break forth in song; maybe the trees *will* clap their hands! After all, Paul says that **“creation itself (which has been groaning) will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”** (Romans 8:21) Maybe creation really *will* do the opposite of groaning. Maybe all creation will rejoice and sing out on that day! Maybe creation will literally clap its hands when our Lord returns to make all things new.

I can’t say for sure whether that’s *literally* going to happen, but I *can* say this: **“you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.”** On that day, you will go forth from this old creation, subject as it is to frustration, you will go into that new creation where every promise of God will be proven to be “yes” in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ will call you to new life to live forever with Him in a *new* creation where Jesus creates all things new. And this hasn’t happened *yet*, but I say truthfully that it *will* happen—not because *I* say so, but because *God* says so. God has given you His Word on the matter.

Now, here’s the rub. *You* know that day is coming. You *know* that Christ will come again to judge both the living and the dead. You *know* according to what criteria Christ will judge the world. You know that He will separate believers from unbelievers as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. You know this because you have read God’s Word, and the Holy Spirit has revealed it to you. You know that you will be among the sheep, because God’s Word has had effect on your life and in your heart. You know and believe that you could not save yourself—you’d have no hope at all if that were required—but that Christ died for you and was raised for you and, because of this, your sins are forgiven and you too shall live. You *know* this. But you also know a lot of people that do *not* know this.

And in a farming community here in Southwest Minnesota, you *also* know how vital and important rain is. You know how *effective* rain is. And God’s Word to you today is that His *Word* that *He* sends is like the *rain* that *He* sends. It is not empty; it works. And just as He has proven time and again that as His Word says, it will be, He now says to you—even working *through* you—He says, **“My Word...shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”** He has given you His Word so that *you* can make it rain. And we need good *soaking* rain. May God help us, in Jesus’ name. Amen. **“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.