

God's Word Produces What He Desires

Isaiah 55:6-11

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found! Call on him while he is near! ⁷ Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy. Let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans. ¹⁰ Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.

We don't get our way. If we had our way, we probably wouldn't be here. We'd be fishing, or golfing, at home watching a favorite series, at a movie, or maybe just at home with our family. But we don't get our way. Instead, God gets his way. And because God gets his way, we are sitting at his feet in his house feeding our soul with God's saving word. It's a good thing that God gets his way.

It's a good thing that we don't get our way. Our way often follows the way of the world. That means spending incredible amounts of money and effort to make this life more enjoyable. But our way is worse than that. Our way is wicked. Our way is selfish. It is sinful. It brings us God's wrath. It brings death. It leaves us lost forever. It's a good thing God doesn't let us get our way.

God sent his prophet Isaiah to command God's people, "*Seek the LORD while he may be found! Call on him while he is near! Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy. Let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly pardon.*" It's not God's way to let sinners like us perish. But it is God's way to punish sin. He must punish sin. He is holy. He must punish all who do not follow his way. He must punish any who are not holy like him. He can't get around that.

Thankfully he found a way to punish our sin without punishing us for that sin. And only God could find a way to do that. For he tells us, "*Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans.*" God in his infinite wisdom found a way to punish our sin without punishing us. God's way was to punish someone in our place. And it wasn't just anyone. It was his own Son. Think of how heart wrenching that must have been for God. When Jesus lived on earth, God finally found someone worthy of his divine love. Resisting every temptation that came his way, Jesus lived the way our holy God expects. But then came that dreaded day. God released all his anger and punishment for all sin. But he didn't send it your way or mine. He left it all on his Son. Pinned to a cross, Jesus suffered and died to free us from sin's punishment, to release us from death, to award us life. And when he showed up alive again on Easter, he gave real meaning to his words: "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die*" (John 11:25,26).

God had his way. God's way frees us from sin and its punishment. And God's way makes death not the end of life. He makes it the beginning of life—real, eternal, glorious life with him. It's good that God gets his way.

Martin Luther once described the gospel like a passing shower. It gives life-giving moisture but keeps moving away from those who reject it. For the most part, God's Old Testament people had rejected the opportunity to grow in God's word. What about us? Are we tempted to do the same? Are we sometimes like some who are confirmed in the faith? They feel they've come to a peak in their understanding. They can't possibly learn more about God. And the rest of their life is just downward spiral. Faith comes from hearing the message. And those who fail to hear God's word will lose their faith and be lost for all eternity. And that would be our lot except that God has preserved his holy word among us.

He gives us his word to accomplish what he desires. *Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater,* ¹¹ *in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.* All of creation depends on God for its existence. In six days God used his powerful word to bring life to every living creature and to bring everything else in existence. God remains active in keeping his creation alive. He sends rain and snow from above to make things on earth grow. Before precipitation evaporates and returns to the clouds in the form of water vapor, it brings moisture to plants, trees, grass, and everything else living on earth. The rain and snow help to produce seed in plants so that life can continue to on earth. Seed can be ground up and made into food. It can be put back into the soil to produce more food for a world full of animals and people. God sure knew what he was doing when he made the world and sustains this world as well.

As God sends moisture to sustain life on the earth, he sends his word to bring life to sinful mankind. God shows us in his word why we need him to bring us life. To Nicodemus, Jesus said, *"Flesh gives birth to flesh"* (John 3:6). Deadly sin is passed on from one generation to the next. And sin leaves us in such sad shape. God used the apostle Paul to tell us how sad, *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins"* (Ephesians 2:1). We enter life without an ounce of spiritual life in us. And we would remain that way forever. Except for the fact that God got his way. He wanted us to have life. That's why he told his prophet Ezekiel, *"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live"* (Ezekiel 33:11). Our text brings that out as well: *Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy. Let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly pardon.*

God wants all sinners to turn to him. He uses his powerful word to accomplish it. God comes to us in his word and shows us why we are not good enough to live with him forever. He shows us how we have failed him with our sinfulness and deserve only punishment from him. He desires that we turn our hearts back to him and confess as one penitent sinner in the temple did, *"God have mercy on me, a sinner"* (Luke 18:13). God doesn't use terrible plagues like he did in Egypt to get us to repent. He doesn't use severe windstorms, or violent earthquakes, or

a blazing inferno, like he showed the prophet Elijah. He uses a gentle whisper. His powerful word will turn hearts back to him.

If God uses his word to turn hearts back to him, then why are we sometime hesitant to use it. That is especially true when we're dealing with someone who is caught in a sin. Maybe we're afraid that we might offend the person, or hurt his or her feelings if we bring up the subject. God did tell one of his prophets, *"If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood"* (Ezekiel 33:6). People caught in a sinful trap do not need us to look the other way. They need us to lovingly use God's word to turn them back to him. Maybe they need to hear these words from Hebrews chapter 10: *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God...How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?... It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:26-31).* God's word will accomplish what he desires. He wants sinful hearts to turn back to him.

Only God can turn sinful hearts back to him in repentance. He does this with his word. Once God does this, God uses his word to further accomplish what he desires. He nourishes our souls. God shows us how he does this by the way he brings and sustains life on the earth. God sends rain and snow showers. Moisture seeps into the grounds and gets to the roots of trees and plants. That is how God uses his word. He once used prophets to bring his word to people. The Bible tells us of one of them. *The Lord was with Samuel...and he let none of his words fall to the ground* (1 Samuel 3:19). When prophets faithfully preached to people, God's word never fell to the ground. I always reached human hearts. After he sent his Son to save our world, God would then send apostles and evangelists to bring his word to people. The apostle Paul was one that God used to bring his word to people. In his letter to the Romans, Paul confessed: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"* (1:16). The writer to the Hebrews spoke of the word's effectiveness: *The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow* (4:12)

You and I have witnessed the power of God's word in our life. For many of us as infants it came in the simple act of baptism. With just a splash of water and the powerful word of God we were washed clean of all sin and wrapped up in Christ's holiness. God's word worked powerfully through our instruction as children. Through Sunday School, family devotions, Christian day school, and catechism with our pastor, God's word kept you growing in faith. And now through faithful attendance in worship and at Bible class and with private devotions your faith keeps growing, until the day you receive the goal of your faith—eternal life with your Lord in paradise.

It is good that God gets his way. Left to ourselves we easily stray and are lost. But our Lord searched for us through the Christians in our life. Now we are safely in God's care. That's what God wants for us and for all.