

*Isaiah 55:10–13 (ESV)*

<sup>10</sup> “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, <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> “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. <sup>13</sup> 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.”

*Isaiah 55:10–13 (NIV84)*

<sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.”

### What Makes the Word so Important?

What’s important to you today? What’s on your agenda this week? I’ve got to run my son up to football camp today. Tomorrow, I have to attend a meeting in Jackson and there’s church tomorrow night. I have meetings and classes scheduled later in the week. And, of course, I have to get ready to preach next week and some time in the next couple of weeks, I ought to start thinking about catechism class and adult Bible class for this fall. Now, do you think all those things are equally important? Of course not. What if this afternoon, just as we’re about to take my son to football camp, the phone rings and someone is in the emergency room and they might not make it? Would that be more important? Of course it would. But even if that happens, at some time today, somebody needs to take my son to camp. That’s urgent – if we don’t take care of it today, he’s going to be late. But there are lots of things that are more important.

How much of your life do you live under the tyranny of the urgent? How much time do you spend running to meet some deadline – the start of practice or work, the due date for a payment? Every demand on our time is not equally important. Our marriages are far more important even than our jobs or even our mortgage payments. Teaching our children to know the Lord, teaching them that we love them and that they matter to us is far more important than a great many other things that we spend enormous amounts of time and energy doing.

When I was a student at the seminary, one of our professors talked to us about the tyranny of the urgent. He told us that we pastors had to make time for something very routine, something that we could always put off until tomorrow, but something that was far more important than almost all those deadline driven things we pastors have to do. You know what that thing was? Bible study. The most important thing we pastors need to do is read our Bible regularly. And if that’s true for guys like me, it’s true for you, too.

#### I.

But you may ask why? After all, you know your Savior. You will get to heaven. So what’s the big deal? **What makes the Word so important? It accomplishes God’s purpose.** Isaiah illustrates that for us in a very memorable way this morning. Through him, God says that his word is like the rain and snow. They fall and they don’t go back up into the clouds until they’ve watered the earth and provided all the food that we eat. We’ve had a fairly dramatic illustration of the effect of rain this year. In the spring and early summer, we had so much rain that most of our yards were underwater. But along about July 1<sup>st</sup>, all that rain stopped. And our yard which had been green and growing so fast that mowing it once a week was barely enough turned yellow.

We haven't mowed in over a month. Just in the last week or two, it's started to rain again. Now, our grass is green again and badly needs to be mowed.

Water is life. And God says that his word is like water. It goes out from his mouth and it accomplishes the purpose to which he sent it. God sends it to give us life. That makes his word so much more important than so many other things that we have to do or that we like to do. None of us here would argue that eating and drinking are unimportant. No matter how busy you are, you take time every day to feed and hydrate your body. Even if you skip a meal when you're really busy, very few of us go all day without eating or at least drinking something. God's word is life. It gives us more than the physical life that we have for the seventy or eighty years that we walk on this planet. God's word gives us eternal life. And it's the only thing that can do that, because God's word is the only thing that can give us faith. We only reach heaven if we have faith that Jesus died and took our sins away.

Sometimes, we get confused about that. Sometimes, we think that being good gets us to heaven or that being good is what it means to be a Christian. A couple of weeks ago, I read a book entitled *What the Founding Fathers Really Believed*. The book was apparently written by a Christian, but again and again, he equated being a believer with having high morals. He quoted people like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams clearly rejecting the idea that Jesus is the Son of God, rejecting the idea of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rejecting the idea that the Bible is the Word of God. But all three of them repeatedly stated that Jesus' teachings on a moral life were the best teachings a person could have and we should all follow them. And all three of them believed they would go to heaven because they were good people who fought against tyranny and led good lives.

They needed the word. They needed to hear God's message that not one of us is good enough to get to heaven. Fighting against tyranny doesn't earn us eternal life. The best we can do falls short and only lands us in hell. God sends that word out so that you and I tremble. He wants us to feel the hot breath of hell on our face and know that we need him to provide a way out. And he does. Jesus provides that way out. Jesus died and he rose and he took our sins away. And the only way that you and I can ever know that is through that word. The water of life, the gospel, comes and it enters our hearts and faith springs to life.

But every one of us here already knows that. So why do we need to hear it again? For the same reason that all that rain in May and June didn't do my grass any good in July. For the same reason that your body, which is alive and well hydrated today will not survive if tomorrow you fly out to Death Valley and get lost in the desert. Without more water, you will die. Without more water of life, your faith will die. Isaiah says that the word of God causes the earth to bring forth and sprout so that the farmer has a crop. He pictures not just the beginning of life, but a whole cycle of life. That's our faith he's picturing. We need the gospel of Jesus Christ to keep our faith alive.

One of the devil's greatest tricks is convincing us that because we've heard all this before we don't need to hear it all again. He wants to dry out and wither our faith so that we die and spend eternity in hell. You know what? When it comes to a believer, to someone like you and me who already trusts in Jesus, he can get away with that if we let him. If we don't hear the word, if we don't think it's as important as all that other stuff we have to do, if we let work and family responsibilities and our need for entertainment and relaxation take precedence over hearing the word, the devil will wither our faith. And if you don't think it can happen to you, just pull out an old directory from our congregation and read the names of people you used to see come regularly to hear the word here, but who don't come anymore. We are no better than they were. And if they could let their faith wither and die, so can we.

It's sin that makes the word of God the least important thing in our lives. It's sin that doesn't want to come and hear that word. Why should God keep dragging us back if we know it's important but we let the tyranny of the urgent keep us away? He shouldn't. But he does. He loves us. He keeps coming back to us and telling us that Christ died even for our failure to put his word first. Christ rose and wiped that sin away. My friends, that's the water of life. That water renews and revitalizes your faith. Drink deep of that water today!

## II.

The reality of our lives is that we live in a spiritual desert. The children of Israel understood that better than we do, because they didn't live in a green, well watered land like we do. They lived in a land that has more in common with the American west. It was not a desert. But it was close enough to the desert for them to see what happened when the rain didn't come. So when God spoke of life as a desert and his word as water that

makes the desert bloom, that was a very rich image for them. In a very concrete way it answered the question: **What makes the Word so important? It leads us forth in joy.**

My first call in the ministry was to serve as a missionary in South America. Right after we got married, my wife and I went to a university in northern Mexico to study Spanish. The land there is brown and dry and filled with scrub brush and desert plants. We went from there to Colombia which is very green. After those months in the desert scrub, my eyes almost ached when I saw the green. It lifted my spirits even though I felt a little lost and homesick in a country where I knew almost nobody.

Isaiah reflected that same kind of joy when he said, **“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.”** The desert scrub is replaced by green plants that only grow where there’s water. What’s this a picture of? Eternal life. In Romans St. Paul says the whole universe is groaning in bondage to decay, waiting to be delivered from what sin does to it. The world as we know it is broken. Sin has corrupted and ruined it. But when Jesus comes back, he will set it free. The Old Testament preferred the picture of a desert. Again and again, the prophets speak of water flowing in the desert, of the desert blooming and coming to life. They were talking about what happens when God works through his word. In the end, Jesus will return and he will cause this desert of sin to be restored to the world it was when he first made it. The universe will stop groaning. Everything will be perfect again and, as Isaiah says here this morning, it will rejoice in what God has done.

And notice what we will do. Isaiah said, **“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.”** We will go forth in joy and in peace. It isn’t just the creation that suffers from what sin has done to this world. We suffer from it. All the anxiety and fear that plague our lives, all the conflict and all the hurt come from sin. And sometimes when we look at what’s going on around us, it brings a chill to our hearts and a knot to a stomach. But when Jesus comes back all that will change. All that sin has done to this world will be erased and we will live in a perfect world in perfect joy and peace forever. That change will be the everlasting sign of the Lord. It will never die or be cut off. Forever, we will celebrate what God has done for us.

And you know how we know all that? Through his word. This is the promise that God gives us in the gospel. And God’s promises always come true. No matter how long we have to wait for it to come, it is coming. That promise is the water of life, the gospel. It gives us life right now. Right now, God has given us faith through that promise of a new and better life to come. Right now, God gives us peace and comfort and joy as we wait for the good things he has in store for us. We wait, because we’ve heard the promise.

We are alive by faith right now. This week, we’re going to have to mow our lawn again. That’s amazing, because it was dead and brown just a few weeks ago. Truthfully, in April, when the snow finally melted, it was dead and brown. Yet, now, for the second time this year, it’s green and growing. That’s what water does for plants. And the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is water for our faith. Our faith can get pretty weak. It can feel almost dead. Without that water in the end, it will die. But every time we come and hear about our Savior, God reaches into our hearts with his water and he renews our life. He causes us to grow in faith. He brings us closer to him. My friends, come and hear that word, over and over again, until you reach eternal life. Amen.