

The Word Gives Life

Message

Sermon: Pentecost 6

Text: Isaiah 55:10–11

Other Lessons: Psalm 65; Romans 8:12-17; Matthew 13:1–9 (18–23)

Theme of the Day: Guaranteed Return

Goal of the Message: The hearer moves closer to God through the power of the Word.

Our text, vv 10–11, must be considered within its context, vv 1–13, for clarity of meaning. Apart from this context, the text is capable of any number of varying interpretations. But anchored to the preceding and following verses, the text and its interpretation narrow considerably and focus clearly on the effectiveness of the Word.

Vv 1–6 contain God’s Gospel call for the hearers to come to him. The gracious invitation is conveyed through the Word: “Listen, listen to me . . . Give ear . . . hear me . . . you [Christ] will summon . . .” Additional references to the Word include “my faithful love promised to David” and the exhortation to seek the Lord “while he may be found,” i.e., while he still extends his gracious and open invitation through the Word, and before he returns in person to judge all flesh. For the Word also speaks of an approaching time of judgment (63:1–6; 64:1–2; 66:24) for those who do not listen to or answer God’s call (65:12; 66:4).

Caution: *I have heard people ask, “Pastor, all my children grew up hearing the Word. Why do some of them believe, and others do not?” The text is not attempting to answer that question. Isaiah is not saying that everyone who hears the Word will come to faith. He is simply and powerfully asserting the effectiveness of the Word in accomplishing God’s purpose.*

When two identical seeds are planted side by side in good soil, no farmer or gardener can tell you the reason why one grows up to bear much fruit while the other does not. But he can certainly tell you about the effectiveness and necessity of the rain that God so generously provides. Also, no one can tell you the reason why some believe the Word while other hearers do not. Nevertheless, we embrace and believe the mystery that the gracious Word is the effective power of salvation. The purpose of theology is not to do away with mystery, but to confess those truths God has revealed to us in his Word.

1. Introductory thought

One of the most humbling and gratifying thoughts I return to in my journey through life is the thought that God wants me. He could have anyone he wants—someone rich, famous, powerful, brilliant. But he wants me. We learn that from vv 6–7 of Isaiah 55: “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” Not only does he want us, he comes near to us through his Word. He is easy to find, because he finds us.

2. Problem

The problem is that my sin has created a separation between God and me that I am powerless to do anything about. V 7 hints at this when it tells us that the wicked should forsake their ways and the evil people should give up their evil thoughts. And the sad truth is that, no matter how much I want to follow that instruction, I am powerless to make it happen. Paul goes on: For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (7:18–19). Clearly, Paul wants to do the Law of God. And clearly, he finds, day after day, he cannot do it. Like you, the evil he doesn’t want to do seems to be what he keeps on doing. When it comes to righteousness before God, I am lame, bankrupt, blind, impotent.

Vv 8–9 make that even clearer. God says, “You know that what separates us is your sin, but do you know how great is the distance of that separation?” The moon is 235,000 miles from the earth. The sun is 93,000,000 miles away. The nearest stars are light-years away. That gives us some idea of the distance between God’s thoughts and ours.

3. Solution to the problem

The solution is God’s Word, a Word so effective that it has the power to accomplish his purposes in my life. The Word is effective in two ways.

- A. First, I think of the Word of Scripture, God’s written witness to us. He is not a God of silence. He has spoken by the prophets and evangelists. He has done this because he wants to be found. God’s Word is unique. Of all the words thought, spoken, or written throughout history, only God’s Word is consistently able to do what it says. God’s spoken Word engendered creation, brought forth life. It creates and preserves faith.
- B. As marvelous as that is, God’s Word has come to us in a way that is infinitely more personal than a written or spoken word. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in many ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1).

The ultimate manifestation of the effectiveness of God’s Word is the person of Jesus Christ. God’s Word became flesh (Jn 1:1–14). He is God’s message to us. In Christ, God has truly come near so as to be found. In Christ, God demonstrated the depth of his desire for our companionship. God dealt once and for all with the grime of human wickedness that made companionship impossible. God sends out his Word, “watering” his creation with its life-giving effects. God’s Word is the saving message of the Gospel. Jesus is the Word that has come in the flesh. His death and resurrection are God’s ultimate provision for his children. When Christ comes to us in the waters of Baptism, we receive the gift of faith for eternal life and the very Spirit of Jesus in our hearts. The effect of his Word in our lives is ongoing. In Christ, the Word made flesh, God took the burden of our sins upon himself and paid the price for them, so that for those who are in him there is now no condemnation. God has accepted Christ’s payment for our sin. He now says, “You are forgiven. The blood of my Son sets you free to be my people.”

We were created for fellowship with God. The Word has effectively restored that fellowship. God’s love is shown to us as he grants us salvation through his Word. His Word in our lives provides not only eternal life, but also abundant life, which includes the fruit and gifts of the Spirit, the fellowship of believers, the peace of Christ, which is beyond our ability to understand, as well as the process of sanctification, the beauty of becoming more like Jesus each day.

The melted snow and rain water the earth, enabling seeds to sprout, grow, and bear fruit. In this way God sustains human life. So also his Word creates the seed of faith in our hearts. That same Word gives the growth, enabling the seed to sprout and bear abundant fruit, all to the eternal glory of God. God carries out his purposes through the giving of his Word. The desire of God’s heart is that we enjoy life with him forever. It delights him when a person receives the gift of faith (Lk 15:10). His Word accomplishes what he desires. It brings about the knowledge of sin and of our need for a savior. It provides the way of forgiveness and

eternal life. It begins a work in us that is ongoing throughout our lives and which will be brought to perfect completion at the Last Day (Phil 1:6).

God's desire for us is that we also enjoy life with him right now. We don't have to wait for eternity to know God's abundant blessings. Jesus came to bring the abundant life (Jn 10:10). God's Word provides aspects of the abundant life—comfort, hope, joy, encouragement, and guidance. These gifts from God are not only for us to enjoy, but we also are privileged to share them with others.

4. **God's power comes through his Word.**

Only God could accomplish the plan of salvation. It is his power manifested in the Word made flesh that overcame sin, death, and the devil. It is his power that brings that victory to us through the gift of faith.

The power of God through the Word always produces a response. Sometimes that response is guilt and conviction, and other times it is comfort and freedom.

The power of God comes through his Word, going beyond all else.

Beyond our *feelings*: The assurance of our salvation is not based on our feelings, but on the promises of God's Word.

Beyond our *circumstances*: Because of God's Word, we can look at difficult circumstances without becoming overwhelmed by them, for we know that Jesus has overcome all (1 Thess 5:18).

Beyond *death*: We are never without hope, even in seemingly hopeless situations, because God's Word assures us of our ultimate victory in Christ.

Closing appeal

The fact that God loves me so much and delights in my companionship is my motivation to let his powerful Word work in my life, and to let his Word conform my ways of life to his higher ways. Though I fail daily, he never fails to shower his love upon me afresh through his Word, enabling new growth that yields fruit to his glory.

I'd like to leave you with a picture of Christ to ponder. The Johnsons have two sons, ages 10 and 4. The older brother loves to join the other neighborhood children in spirited games of hide-and-seek. Up until now, the 4-year-old, Billy, has never been permitted to join in their fun. He is too little. The older children can easily hide from him, and he is unable to find them. One day, Billy tearfully asks if he can play. Reluctantly, the children agree, but only on the condition that Billy's older brother is "it." The brother closes his eyes and counts, "5, 10 . . . 100. Ready or not, here I come!" He knows Billy will not be able to stray farther than he can search. He knows Billy will become frightened when he discovers that he is alone. And he knows Billy will welcome being found by his older brother. Soon after he starts calling "Billy, Billy," the younger child responds to his word, replying, "Here I am. Find me!" So Jesus Christ, our older Brother, comes looking for us. He finds us through his Word, and we delight in being found.

Our relationship with God is created and sustained by his Word. I celebrate that reality each time I remember my Baptism and participate in the Lord's Supper. When I feel lost and want to find him—or better, to be found by him—I know where to look. He is where his Word is. When I first find him in Baptism, and whenever I am reunited with him in the Eucharist, wonder of wonders, I discover that he has been searching for me! If I should ask, "Lord, how can I be sure you and I are in a good relationship?" he smiles and says to me, "Dear Friend, you have my Word." And that is enough.