

The Word of Yahweh Returns to Him with Success

Good Friday – 03/29/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 55:6-11 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 11, [Yahweh says,] “...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.”

Introduction

✘ I don't know about you, but verse eight of our Old Testament Reading tonight has had so many direct applications over the course of my life – both in good times and in times of difficulty, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD” (Is 55:8).

→ And that is never clearer than when you and I see God hanging dead on a cross. If...and I know it is an impossible if: but if I were God, this is not how I would choose to go about it. I know of someone who shared that he once saw a bit of graffiti on a table in the university library where he attended. It was a crude drawing of a crucifix with these words beneath: “Christians worship a criminal executed by the Romans.”

→ That “artist” was mocking the Christian faith, but he was hardly the first to make such a claim. Deep underground, in the catacombs of Rome, there is similar graffiti that mocks those who worship the crucified Christ. From that time in the first century until now, the message of the cross, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, has been foolishness to the world.

✘ Why? Because when the world looks at the cross, it only sees defeat. More than defeat, the cross proclaims shame and contempt. After all, the cross was devised not only to subject excruciating pain upon its victims, but also to put them on display.

→ You see, crucifixion typically took place in a public location, often along a road to maximize the number of people who would see it. It served as a great deterrent. “Don't get out of line or you'll end up like this guy.” It also magnified the indignity of crucifixion. While dying, crowds would pass by and sneer. Jesus endured that kind of abuse. He was mocked and ridiculed even as He was dying to save the very people who were berating Him.

✘ To many of us, it makes no sense. God – dead on the cross. God – humiliated and ashamed. God put on display to be mocked and trampled under the feet of ungrateful sinners. Yet here at the cross, we see Yahweh's design worked out to perfection. The incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, dies so that He might return to His Father, having done precisely what He descended to do.

I. The Word, written, spoken, and incarnate, succeeds.

✘ That's the wisdom of verses 10–11 before us tonight: “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.”

→ Rain is not just an accident of nature; it is a wonderful gift of God. He sends it for a clear purpose – to water the earth so that it may yield its increase and feed God's beloved creation. A rainy day might disappoint you because you had grand plans for outdoor activities that are now spoiled. But don't be disappointed. Instead, see the rain as the assurance of God's love. He doesn't want you to go hungry, so He sends the rain. It's a simple fact, God sends the rain and it accomplishes His purpose.

- ⊗ So it is, Yahweh says, with His perfect Word. It also accomplishes His purpose; the Word succeeds in the very purpose for which God sent it.
 - ➔ And the Word comes in various forms. That's true of the written Word. Those in Confirmation class memorize and then repeat the words of Scripture much of the time with great consternation and distress. There is no fanfare; they are not excited. Yet the Word of the LORD will not return to Him empty; it will succeed in the purpose for which He sent it. Even with their complaints, young minds are still formed and filled with the Word of God. Another generation receives the saving faith poured into their lives so that it can then pour forth from their mouths as they confess Christ's saving name.
- ⊗ So it is with the spoken Word of Yahweh as well. A pastor speaks the Words of Absolution to a sanctuary of blank faces – usually as emotionless as a rock. And when the sermon is delivered, he might even see some of those faces fighting off sleep and he might be tempted to wonder if the prophets had this happen to them.
 - ➔ But actually they faced much worse. When they spoke the Word of God, it was common that they were directly rejected. It was not blank stares or drooping eyes, but violence and insults that came back at them. That's why John the Baptizer was beheaded. Elijah complained that Ahab and Jezebel had killed off the prophets of Yahweh and he was the only one left.
 - ➔ But in spite of the violent opposition that the prophets received, the Word of Yahweh still did not return to Him void. It accomplished the purpose for which it was sent. Yes, God's Word will succeed in absolving sin because forgiveness does not depend on the excitement or even the appreciation of the one who receives it. It's always and only dependent upon the Word of the LORD.
 - ➔ And so, the spoken Word will ground God's faithful souls in the truth, even when they fight sleep, because even though they are lethargic, the Word of Yahweh is living and active! And when His Word is rejected, it still succeeds in its purpose, convicting them in their sin.
- ⊗ And now tonight on Good Friday, we especially see that the same is true with the incarnate Word of Yahweh. John proclaims it in the opening verses of His Gospel that the eternal Son of God, who is from eternity the Word of God, takes on flesh so that He might live here on earth among God's people. And yes, He accomplishes what He is sent here to do!
 - ➔ He is perfectly successful, even though the world is blind to His success. John 1:10-11 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him."
 - ➔ His success though is so complete that He takes the written Word into Himself as He fulfills every detail of that written Word from Genesis through to the end of Revelation.
 - ➔ His fulfillment of the spoken Word is perfect as He Himself becomes the Prophet of prophets. Those prophets that preceded Jesus' earthly ministry spoke by a higher authority, saying, "Thus saith the LORD." And now this Incarnate Word, Jesus, speaks by the very same authority, but it is His own authority, saying, "Thus I say to you."
- ⊗ Sadly though, this Jesus, who is "God of God and very God of very God" endured far greater opposition than the prophets who were martyred; certainly more resistance than today's pastors who struggle against ears that have grown cold to the Word of God. Still this Word of Yahweh, our Savior, Jesus Christ, absolutely accomplishes what He was sent to do. He was sent to be rejected. He was sent to suffer. He was sent to die.

II. When we do not return, He remains faithful.

✘ My dear Christian friends, you and I must tonight understand though, that Jesus' rejection is not just a historical detail back in the first century where the masses of souls stream by the cross and mock Him. No, here on Good Friday, the masses of souls along our streets and byways still go about their way, driving by Christ's cross that we've placed on our steeples and above our altars; ignoring Him, mocking Him, rejecting His authority just as it happened on that first Friday.

→ But that's not the only place that it happens. Christ is rejected by us as well. You and I see it when we fail to seek after the LORD as Isaiah proclaims in verses 6-7, "Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Oh, my dear souls: Jesus, the Incarnate Word, is just as near to us today as He was to those who crucified Him. He is ever-present for us as God's perfect and inerrant Word both when our ears hear it spoken and our eyes see it written on a page. Yes, He is near for us here and yet we do not always return for more.

→ Eyes remain heavy; ears grow dull and minds become bored because it is not what our world says we should want or expect. Oh, we are so tantalized by the world's empty promises; telling us that our days must be filled with excitement; trying to focus our eyes upon whatever glitters and gleams. So we do not return, though He has called us without abandon.

✘ But Yahweh, He never tires of calling you, because He is faithful to Himself; to His desire; to His purpose. In verse seven Isaiah calls us all, saying, "Let him return to Yahweh, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

→ Yes, be comforted dear Christian. Yahweh does not call you to return so that He can exact judgment upon you. No, He calls you back so that He might pardon you ... in abundance, because a little pardon will not do. Even as great and as "wicked" as our sin is, our God's pardon pours out like a river that always has far more pardon than there is sin. That's the way the LORD is with you. That's what His Word does. He has written it in His Word; He proclaims it in His Word because He put His pardon into human flesh. That One, Jesus, is why and how Yahweh now pardons all of mankind's sin.

✘ But you know...heaps of pardon with unending compassion does not just happen by accident. It comes at a cost; a cost that must be paid by the Word-Made-Flesh. And it all comes together at the cross; right here on this night so many years ago. Here, the Incarnate Word accomplished all for which He was sent; at the cross the Word succeeds in the LORD's perfect purpose.

III. At the cross we see; His way is higher than ours.

✘ The cross – that's why Yahweh sent His Word. "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" (vv.10–11). The rain accomplishes God's reason for sending it; to make the earth bring forth life. Life springs forth from the ground; so shall the Word of Yahweh bring life from the ground.

→ The LORD promised it; His Word promised it. On the third day, life would spring forth from the ground. And it did! But that Word is just the first fruit. Life will literally explode from the ground when the Incarnate Word returns on the Last Day and He will accomplish to its fullest all that He is sent to do. He will succeed perfectly in the purpose for which He is sent; to give life and to give it abundantly; eternally!

✘ And it's all because of this day; where The Word succeeds by the cross. And forty days after He sprung from the earth, He returned to the Father, celebrating His full success; taking up the throne at the right hand of the Father.

→ Remember, Yahweh does not gauge success as we do. He gauges success by pardoning; by covering completely the sins of His people. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, has succeeded in

that great work as well. You can be certain of it, friends. His forgiveness pours out upon you in an unending supply.

- ✘ Oh I know, it may not be the way you or I would have done it, but what we have before us tonight is the height of godly wisdom. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts,” declares our loving, all-powerful, and saving LORD (v.9). This is the cross. Amen.