

My Word

Third Sunday of Lent March 20, 2022

The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Isaiah 55:11 "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth, it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

- Introduction

I remember, some years ago when I lived in Idaho, that a young man aged around fourteen years came to a youth group meeting and I struck up a conversation with him. He was interested in sports and played on the Middle School basketball team, in fact, his team played in just a few days. Without giving it much thought, I told him that I would be happy to come see him play. He seemed pleased, and I made a mental note to include it in my calendar, which means that I proceeded with the rest of the meeting and forgot all about my promise. That is, until the morning of the game. Then it came back to mind. I had other things to do but remembered that I had told him that I would attend, so I managed to clear my schedule late in the afternoon and when the time came, I walked to the middle school gym and watched the game. I think our team won, but don't remember much else about the game, but soon afterward the young man ran up to me and thanked me profusely for watching him play. He was pretty good, and I mentioned something about his parents being proud of him, but he replied that no one in his family bothers to come watch him play. I was the first adult to actually show up. I had made a promise and was shocked to discover that he had taken it much more seriously than I had. We talked for awhile after that, and then he had to go. I walked home, but never forgot how important that promise was to him, and that I needed to take seriously the fulfillment of any promise that I make. I think the passage for today touches on many subjects; sovereignty for example, but also that God makes promises and God keeps promises.

- Set the Stage

Isaiah 55:11 is set in a part of the great prophet's writings that look beyond the impending overthrow of Israel and toward the re-establishment of the nation and beyond that to the end of the age and the fulfillment of all divine plans for humanity. The passage speaks of the power and the goodness of God and emphasizes His authority and sovereignty. He sees the end from the beginning, but even more than that, God speaks the end from the beginning. If we could see the end of time with our eyes and we described it accurately, we would be telling the truth. God sees the end of time and He speaks it into existence. In fact, Hebrews 1:3 tells us that not only did God speak creation into existence, He upholds it by the word of His power. Creation holds together by His authority. This passage addresses that.

- Main Point: His word shall prosper in the thing for which He sent it.

The passage says that God's word, and I think this applies to His written Word as well as to His spoken, prophetic word, is like rain that falls on the desert. It does not seem to do much at first other than get things wet, but then plants start to grow and the flowers bloom. When He speaks, things happen.

- Amplify: accomplish and prosper

Note especially the verbs in this verse. The Word will not return to the Lord void but will accomplish what He pleases and will prosper in the thing that He sends it. I think that accomplish

refers to the authority of God. His Word cannot not do what He desires it to do. To borrow a phrase from the military, failure is not an option. The word "prosper" refers to the goodness of the Lord. He desires good things for His people and the Lord seeks to prosper them. The Book of James calls the Lord the "giver of all good gifts". It says (1:17) "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow or turning." The things in which the Word of God is to prosper include us. That does not mean that there will not be hard times, questions or long evenings in a hospital room. It does mean a covenant of life and strength even when we are weak.

- Application: Isaiah 40:31

The application, I believe, comes from another verse in the same section of Isaiah, several chapters earlier. Isaiah 40:31 says, "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." We don't understand why He does what He does, or why He does not act when we want Him to act, or at least He does not act in a manner that we expect. But He has a way to give us what we need when we need it. He is the giver of every good gift and His Word prospers in us.

- Conclusion

Keeping promises, even small ones, is very important. That young man on the basketball court taught me that years ago. I never saw him again after that night, but I remember him. The Lord is complete in His authority and sovereignty. He is also complete in His goodness. His Word will not return to Him void but will prosper in that which He sends, and that includes us.