

## “What Sayeth You? Isaiah: Working with the Word”

Scripture: Isaiah 55:10-13

Graphics: prophets, exiles, Word, rain

Big Truth: The prophets of the Old Testament were instructed by God, sometimes begrudgingly, to speak God’s truth to His chosen people. They were not always received well and received persecution. Yet, they spoke truth and called the people back to faithful worship and action. Their call was for repentance, rejection of idol worship, love for God, and return to worship of the One True God, Yahweh. In our lives, we are called back to true faith and action, worship and prayer, healing and wholeness during every season of our lives, even the times of lament.

Focus Phrase: When we receive God’s Word, it saves us and sends us out.

### 1. Introduction

- A. The story of Hirro Onoda is fascinating. Maybe you know it, maybe you don’t. Lieutenant Onoda spent years training to be a specialized guerrilla warfare soldier in the Japanese Army during WWII. Near the end of the war, Onoda fled to the jungle with three other soldiers to escape capture. What they didn’t know was that soon after they fled into the jungle, the Japanese surrendered to the Allied Forces and the war was over. Onoda never got the word. Years later, he was still fighting and trying to survive when leaflets were dropped in the jungle telling him the war was over. When he read those leaflets, he was convinced it was a ploy to draw them out. So, for **27 years** after the end of the war - until 1972 when he finally surrendered - Onoda was fighting the battle in the jungle. He never got the word...and the one word he did receive he didn’t believe.
- B. Words are powerful. The words we hear and the words we say. Many of the words we say are just words, like in a conversation. Other times, words are important and critical for us to understand and respond to. For Onoda, receiving and believing the word about the end of the war would have saved him a lifetime of struggle in the jungle.
- C. In today’s final message from our What Sayeth You series, we’ll see that the **Words from God** are the most critical words in our lives. And, like Onoda in the jungle, the Word from God to the Jewish exiles in Babylon in the 7th century BC were important and critical to understand.
- D. We’ve been spending time with some of the Old Testament prophets who had something profound to say to the people of Israel...God’s chosen people.
- E. And, because we have access to those words as well, we know that the Holy Spirit intends for us to hear those words and put them into practice in our lives.
- F. So far, we’ve heard from Hosea, Moses, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. And today, we’ll hear from none other than Isaiah.

- G. Isaiah was one of the most important prophets in the Old Testament. He preached prolifically to the people of Israel...who were in exile in Babylon.
- H. And, while much of what Isaiah spoke for God was corrective, calling the people back to faithful worship and away from idols, in our scripture today, God spoke a word of hope for the future through Isaiah.
- I. Let's pray and then we can dive into the Word today...
- J. PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- K. Turn with me, one final time, to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, starting in verse 10. Ready?

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ Isaiah 55:10-11

- i. Isaiah used such incredible imagery here. As a recovering environmental engineer, it's cool to read that Isaiah used the image of the water cycle to give his readers a picture of what God does with his Word.
- ii. But before we get to that, what is this Word that God sends onto the earth like rain and snow?
  - a. It's the Word that God spoke at **Creation** - forming the heavens and the earth and all the universe.
  - b. It's the Word spoken **to Abraham** telling him that, through him, God would create a people that would be more numerous than grains of sand.
  - c. It's the Word given **to Jacob**, changing his name to Israel and starting a holy nation of priests who were chosen and treasured.
  - d. It's the **Torah** and the **history** of the nation of Israel and the words of the prophets like Hosea, Moses, Jeremiah, and Zechariah telling the people what God wanted and expected of them.
  - e. The Word of God is all the **prophecies** that point to the Messiah and the culmination of the Jewish Law.
  - f. For us, as followers of Jesus Christ, God's Word **is Jesus** - the Word made flesh, as it says in John 1:1-5 - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
  - g. God's WORD is everything that tells us of our loving God who, from the beginning, loved His creation and cares for us. God's WORD tells us of his character and his glory. It tells us of God's love and promises and plans for us as His people...and what God expects of us.

- h. And, God's word WILL NOT BE STOPPED by anything for anyone!  
It's the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- iii. That's why Isaiah told the people about this WORD from God and what it will do.
  - a. It's like rain and snow that fall from the sky and water the earth. Eventually, that water evaporates and goes back up into the atmosphere in this elaborate water cycle. Yet, when it falls on the earth, it waters the plants. It gives us water to drink. Besides that, we use water to shower and use for cooking and to boat on. We can even ski and snowmobile on the snow for part of the year in some places.
  - b. God's WORD is like the rain and snow that falls on the earth, watering everything and bringing life! Water is **essential** for life!
  - c. Isaiah specifically mentions that water helps the grain to grow which leads to bread being made. Those are metaphors for the essentials in our lives. Food and water are needed for life.
  - d. God said, in verse 11, "...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 succeed in the thing for which I sent it."
  - e. Like water and rain that goes out into the world to water the earth, grow the grain, and provide for the making of bread, the WORD of GOD goes out into the world through the church, to grow disciples, and to provide food for people to grow spiritually. It does the WORK in our lives that God intends for it to do.
  - f. But what is that work? Well...let's keep reading to see what it would do for the exiles in Babylon...

**B. READ Isaiah 55:12-13**

- i. Remember that God was speaking TO the exiles through Isaiah. The Word of God would accomplish everything that God desired. In the case of the exiles, it would be going out from Babylon with JOY and returning to Jerusalem in peace.
- ii. No longer would they be captives, but because God spoke it, they would be free to return.
- iii. And on their return, there's this picture of the mountains rejoicing with songs. The trees clapping their hands for their return from exile.
- iv. I'm sure the people missed their mountains and climate and everything about being home. We love to travel, but coming home is always comforting.

- v. Instead of thorns and briars - a symbol for the painful difficulties of captivity - cypress trees and myrtle would grow, welcoming them home with gladness, provision, and peace.
- vi. Those mountains and trees would be a lasting memorial to what God's word had done for them...the awesomeness of God's power and provision for them.
- vii. They would be coming home through the power of God's word, and would be changed by the journey and the return. They would never again be taken into captivity like that.
- viii. God used the Babylonians to show the Israelites the errors of their ways. But, soon, it would be time to return in peace.
- ix. If only Lieutenant Hirro Onoda had received the message that it was OK to come home. He spent so many years fighting a battle that wasn't his to fight. He spent so many years cutoff from others and thinking that he had to keep fighting against an enemy that didn't exist.

### 3. Application

- A. **When we receive God's Word - all of it, especially Jesus - it frees us, brings us home, and sends us out.**
- B. We've spent many weeks talking about being in exile, lamenting, and, last week, searching for peace.
- C. The answer to every painful and difficult times in our lives IS the word of God sent into our lives by a loving Father. In fact, even when we're unsure how to proceed, or even IF we can, God's word is the answer.
- D. Now, I hear that said a lot. Things like, "Jesus is the answer." or "The bible has the answers." Sometimes, those are just things we say when we or someone we love is in a time of struggle.
- E. Yet, the foundational truth that we live by as followers of Jesus is that, INDEED, the bible DOES contain everything we need for salvation. Our Methodist polity says that God's word is 'sufficient' for salvation.
- F. In this book (bible), which is much more than a book, are the messages from God throughout all time, that show us who He is, what He has done, and what He wants our response to be.
- G. I can't emphasize enough how life-giving and critical it is to spend time reading and reflecting on the words in this book.
- H. I'll admit that there have been seasons in my life that I've not spent as much time in this book as I felt God was asking of me. Other times, I've read through the whole Bible in a year, like I currently am this year.

- I. What you'll find when you open your bible and read it is the incredible message of God's love for you and the world, despite your sin and failures. You'll find comfort in times of struggle and hope in times of doubt. You'll find real, honest, stories of women and men who were not perfect, but who were used by God to accomplish His purposes. There is almost no sugar-coating of any of the stories of God's people in here.
- J. Yet, you can read the words in here and still not believe them. Hirro Onoda read the words of the surrender of the Japanese forces in WWII and didn't believe them. In doing that, those words became ineffective and void.
- K. This word is never ineffective or void as long as you're willing to believe them and then allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life through them.
- L. If I were to give us a roadmap this morning for how to respond to what God said to Isaiah, it would be this:
  - i. First stop: **read and believe the words of the bible.**
    - a. This (bible) is God's word to us. This, with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, is what God has given us to believe in and follow. In this, we're staking all our faith...on the One, Jesus, who is at the center of it all. And when you're tempted to doubt, remember that Jesus is the only one to ever walk out of his own grave under his own power.
    - b. 2 Peter 1:19–21 “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
    - c. Matthew 24:35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”
    - d. Read it. Reflect on it. Test it. Challenge it. Believe it. What we can't do is change it, make it say what it doesn't, or find ways around it. That's been tried. It doesn't work.
    - e. Read and believe the words in the Bible.
  - ii. Second stop, **allow the words to save you and change you every day.**
    - a. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”
    - b. Hebrews 4:12–13 “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit,

of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

- c. Hirro Anoda wasn't convinced or changed by the word that came to him about the war. He just kept doing what he was doing.
  - d. The word of God is powerful enough to change sinners into sinners-saved-by-grace. Jesus is powerful enough to end addictions, restore marriages, defeat depression and anxiety, bring wayward daughters and sons back to the Lord, and so much more. He's THAT powerful.
  - e. And the Word can change every circumstance in your life as well...first by saving you for everlasting life with Jesus, and then by saving and changing you every single day.
  - f. If we would only allow it to do the powerful work of transformation.
- iii. Finally: **Be sent out as a sower with seeds of God's word.**
- a. Romans 10:14-15 “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!””
  - b. This scripture doesn't mean you have to be an ordained minister to preach - to be a sower of seeds. In fact, the trend in the world is that there are less and less ordained pastors leading churches. And yet the work of preaching is even more urgent now than ever before.
  - c. What that means is it's your job to be a sower of the Word in the gardens of your life - at work, at home, at church, in your community, and wherever you are.
  - d. Be sent out so that others will read it and believe it, be saved and changed by it, and also be sent out.

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. What Sayeth You, Isaiah?
- B. Isaiah's word for us today is this: God's word is powerful and has purpose. It WILL accomplish its purpose regardless of what we do. Yet, God wants to keep giving you abundant life THROUGH His word.
- C. Read it. Believe it. Be saved by it. Be changed by it. Go and sow. Don't be like Hirro Onoda :)
- D. Maybe we'll circle back to more of the prophets at some point in the future. For now...
- E. What Sayeth YOU? Let's pray...