



Isaiah 55:6-11 - ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.

⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way
and the evil man his thoughts.

Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.

⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ 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,

¹¹ 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.

God's Word – It Works!



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

“Does it work?” That was the question that blurted out of my mouth before I could catch myself. I was having a conversation with someone who had recently joined a direct sales team that sold wraps – not like turkey sandwiches in tortilla shells (I probably would’ve been more interested if that was the case) – they sold body wraps made of seaweed or something gross like that. Apparently, by encasing your midsection in this cold, congealed kelp you would unleash the power of some kind of fat destroying super vitamins, and within a matter of a few treatments, you’d be beach body ready just in time for summer. Then, in no time, you’d be posting “before and after” pictures of your tummy on your Facebook wall, telling abroad the wonders of this product that changed your life. A couple of things about that – First, I’ve never been a fan of seaweed even brushing against my feet while swimming in the lake, so the thought of ensconcing my torso in seaweed wasn’t immediately appealing. Secondly, I reasoned it would take more than a couple of seaweed wraps and some well-wishes to get me “beach body ready.” But in spite of my skepticism – I was intrigued. I wondered if this product could do all that was promised. I wondered if it would deliver. So, I blurted out the question that would naturally come to any skeptic’s mind, “Does it work?” The funny thing was – the name of the company was “It Works!” So, my asking the question “Does it work,” was the equivalent of throwing a softball to home run derby champ, Aaron Judge and watching as it sailed out into the stratosphere.

Now, don’t misunderstand me. I’m not ragging on direct sales, far from it. I’m just saying that with a plethora of products promising to make my life easier, my wallet fatter, and my waistline thinner, I’ve become a little bit skeptical of some of those bold claims. If you’re anything like me, you don’t like the feeling that someone’s taking advantage of you, feeding you a line, or ripping you off. So when we hear bold and confident promises that sound too easy, too pie-in-the-sky, simply too good to be true, we’re skeptical. I think it’s good to be an informed consumer. I’m sure we’ve all got some “life-changing” gadget that we thought was so cool, but now occupies space on a shelf in the garage. We’ve all got our defenses up against the snake oil salesman who comes to town promising that something so simple could affect such a drastic change in our lives.

It can be good to be critical of salesman’s promises, but have you ever noticed how easily that critical ear transfers into our spiritual lives? Soon enough, the promises of God are subjected to the same test of “does it sound too good to be true?” To say nothing of the central promises of the gospel – forgiveness of sins, relationship with God, and eternal life – notice the bold promise that’s made in our Scripture lessons for today: the Word of God is powerful; it works! Paul needed to remind the Romans of that truth. *In a world that seems to be groaning in pain, we put our hope in the powerful word of God’s promise.* In our gospel lesson, Jesus highlights the power of God’s Word in one of his better-known parables. The soil is dead and lifeless – until the Word of God gets involved, bringing life and growth. And perhaps in the most bold terms of all, the prophet Isaiah was called to remind Israel, **As**



the rain and 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, 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. Simply put, the Word works! Not one of the promises of God would go unfulfilled. God would deliver on every assurance he gave his people, Israel. And did they need it!

God's people had fallen off the idol wagon and hit their head on the way down. Instead of trusting in the true God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt, defeated their enemy nations, and gave them a Promised Land of their very own – they turned to the idols of the nations around them. Soon enough, instead of worshiping the Maker of heaven and earth, they bowed the knee to a man-made Baal sculpture. In place of worshipping the true God who said, "Let there be," and placed the sun, moon, and stars in the sky, Israel worshiped those heavenly bodies rather than the God in heaven who put them there. Israel would be taken into exile in Babylon because of their sins, but look and marvel at the grace of God, still reaching out, still calling, still inviting. Isaiah told them, **Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.** Seek the LORD while he may be found – *where do I go? What mountain should I climb? What good work should I perform?* That's not how it works.

How does God invite us to come to him? Where can we seek so that we might find God? How will we know to call on him so that he'll hear us? How can the wicked forsake his sinful ways and the evil man his nasty thoughts? How does all of this happen? Only where God has promised that it will happen – through his powerful Word. It works! With fierce warnings of God's wrath against sin, the prophet calls us to see how we stack up compared with God's holiness. With the pure gospel invitation of free forgiveness, God draws people to himself. Human beings could never hope to find God on their own. The simple truth is that God exists in unapproachable light, far beyond the short arms of puny human logic. Human reason is not only finite but also damaged, along with everything else in this world. God is unknowable and unreachable by the best of human thought – like the sunset to a person born blind, only more so. God said it pretty clearly, **As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** If we are to know God at all, God needs to reveal himself to us.

And just how does God choose to reveal himself? What are these high and lofty ways beyond the thought or capability of any human being? How does God reveal himself? In what seems like utter foolishness - what appears to the world as weak and as ineffective as can be – he reveals himself through his Word. Whether that's lines on a page in your Bible, proclaimed into your ear by a fellow Christian, connected with water in Baptism, or linked with wheat and wine in the Supper, this is how God reveals himself. Here is where God calls us to seek him – in the places where he's promised always to be found with his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness. That's a pretty bold claim. So bold, that



we might be ready to blurt out the question, “*Does it work?*” Admittedly, God’s way of working makes no sense to the human mind – and maybe that’s the point. While countless millions and billions of people have abandoned the clear word of God in favor of a God of their own making (one that fits inside their head), there God is, still calling, inviting, and promising in such a lowly and humble way. He calls on us to trust him and his promises.

But does it work? *Trust in a promise of God when the bill collectors at my door are very real and tangible? Proclaim the pure Word of God when it will likely offend so many? People don’t need to hear about sin – they need to hear about self improvement! Somehow, I’m supposed to believe that what God says is happening in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper is actually happening? It doesn’t make sense! As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* And thank God that they are. No one in the world’s history would’ve dreamed up a salvation plan like the one our God reveals in his Word. Nobody – absolutely no one – would have thought of such an unthinkable, offensive plan; that God would sacrifice his own Son to pay for the sins of a world that wanted nothing to do with him. And THEN, the manner in which God chooses to reveal and give the blessings of forgiveness of sins, a relationship with a holy God, and life forever in heaven; he reveals and gives those things through his Word and Sacraments! Unreasonable. Unthinkable. Unbelievably powerful – because here we find the gospel; the Word and promise of God.

What an utterly foolish thought, but an infinitely profound truth: That through the mouth of an unimpressive human standing before you, you hear the promise of God in Christ: *I forgive you all your sins.* What an utterly foolish thought, but an infinitely profound truth: That with some splashes of water and a word of promise, the God of the universe adopted me into his family, washed away my sins, and made heaven my home. What an utterly foolish thought, but an infinitely profound truth: That with a wafer of bread and a sip of wine connected to that Word, I partake in the very, really present body and blood of Christ; the blessing of his work on the cross credited to my account. *Does it work?* You bet it does. How do I know? **[My Word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

So, dear Christian who’s been planted in the Word and called to bear fruit...trust in the power of God’s Word to do what he says. Unleash the power of the gospel by proclaiming the good news of Jesus to those around you. The Word of God isn’t a slick gimmick. God isn’t a snake oil salesman just out for your money before he hits the road. No, this is the God of your salvation telling you he’s forgiven your sins, he’s made you his child, and now you get to share that news with others. Share the Word; leave the results to God. Thank God today and every day for the blessing of his Word – it works! Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)