

Word of God Sunday, September 15, 2019

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As the Rain and the Snow, So Is God's Word

Isaiah 55:10–13

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

The LORD says: “FOR AS THE RAIN AND THE SNOW COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND DON'T RETURN 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).

Even if you've never been there, you've heard about the rains down in Africa. Unlike our four solid seasons, they've got two: the dry season and the wet or green season. In the dry season, everything begins to turn brown. All the grasses and plants wither and dry up. It begins to look like a desert. Even the animals know when the dry season has come. They move away to find food and water in other places. But when those rains come down, then it's the wet season. It waters the earth. Then the stream beds and gullies fill. The landscape turns green again, almost overnight. Plants grow, flowers bloom, animals return. There's life.

What makes the difference between those dry, lifeless times and the times of life and growth? It's the water—the rain and, from the high places, the snow. The rain and the snow make the earth and its creatures alive. And that's exactly how God describes His word through the prophet Isaiah:

*AS THE RAIN AND THE SNOW GIVE LIFE TO THE EARTH,
SO MY WORD GIVES YOU TRUE, ETERNAL LIFE.*

His is a life-giving Word.

I.

So let me ask you, what season are you in? Are you in a dry one or a wet one? Are you alive with the word or dying in a spiritual desert? If you're like me, there are times when it's dry. Times when you feel like you're not growing. Times when you feel perhaps like you're dead inside. It's not *just* a matter of how you feel. We often feel that way—in mind and spirit, in body and soul. Even Christians have those times. Times when we don't *feel* much. When it's like we're living in a desert. Not growing but shriveling up. Empty. Exhausted. Hopeless. Fearful.

It's not *just* about the feeling. Without the word, it's actually real and true. We really are living a life that is dry and lifeless. Without the word, no matter how good we feel on the outside, on the inside we're dying. It's spiritual starvation. It's eternal death.

The worst thing possible in this life is to be without God's word. Or to have His word but not to hear it, read it, pay attention to it, learn it, or meditate on it. In the days of the prophet Amos, about eight hundred years before Christ, the people had closed their ears to God's word. So the Lord threatened to SEND A FAMINE THROUGHOUT THE LAND—NOT A FAMINE OF FOOD OR A THIRST FOR WATER—BUT RATHER A FAMINE OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD (Amos 8:11). People would be spiritually dying and God's word would no longer be there, because they'd ignored and neglected it long enough. That's what can come of despising God's word. That's what came of having the word but not listening, not trusting, not drinking it in.

Then through the prophet Ezekiel, God gave another message, a vision. Ezekiel saw THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. He was standing IN THE MIDDLE OF A VALLEY and IT WAS FULL OF DRY BONES. Full of skeletons. The people of Israel, physically alive but spiritually dying. Because the people were saying, "OUR BONES ARE DRIED UP, AND OUR HOPE IS LOST." And the Lord asked him: "Ezekiel, SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE?" Ezekiel said, "LORD, YOU KNOW." Then God told the prophet to do his job, to PROPHECY OVER THESE BONES. He told the prophet to speak the word of God to them, the word that does NOT RETURN EMPTY but accomplishes His purpose and succeeds in what He wants it to do. And so He did. He spoke God's word. Then the bones started rattling and coming together and the sinews attached and the muscles and then skin covered them and the Spirit entered into those bones and the flesh came on them and breath entered them, AND THEY LIVED AND STOOD ON THEIR FEET like an army, because of God's word being spoken to them, penetrating them and giving them life (see Ezek 37:1–14; Isa 55: 11). So, today as we focus on God's word, we pray: "Lord, my souls sinks to the ground; make me alive with Your word! Give these dry bones Your life and let Your Spirit and Your breath enter me!"

So what do we do in those dry and empty times? When our hearts have become cracked and hardened? When we're not growing and no longer feel alive? I'll tell you what you can't do: You can't make yourself alive or grow. You can't make yourself soft and attentive to God or to your neighbor. You can't do it, and I can't do it. But it is the Lord's job. It's the work of His word. "IT'S THE SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE; THE FLESH IS NO HELP AT ALL," Jesus said. "THE WORDS THAT I'VE SPOKEN TO YOU ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE" (Jn 6:63). Holy Scripture is God's word, the word through which the Holy

Spirit is constantly at work, and so the Holy Scriptures are full of life for you. They water you. They rain down on you. They give you God's wonderful and good gifts.

II.

But it occurred to me as I thought about this image, if you put one drop of water on a parched patch of land, it doesn't do a whole lot. What happens? The water rolls right off. When the ground is hard, cracked, and dry, the water doesn't penetrate. That's why when you speak God's word to someone who isn't a Christian, it may not settle in. But when the ground is watered constantly, when the rains come down, then the ground soaks the water up. It absorbs in. The ground becomes soft. Plants grow. It bears a crop, a good harvest, abundant fruit. When the water comes regularly, then the earth does what God wants it to do. And so it is with us as Christians. We are to hear and learn and meditate on God's word, not just a little thimbleful at a time, but to let it rain over us again and again and again.

And then when those dry seasons come, do you know what happens to the plants and the trees? Their roots dig deeper. They go in search of the water and then they survive. And with that water, they'll be able to survive even the harshest conditions. So also for us, when we find the conditions in our lives harsh, let us seek out the place where God says He gives life. Turn to His word and hear again His life-giving words. His word is a source of living water for us. To have it fall down on us each Sunday is a gift and a blessing. To have His word in our homes where we can hear it morning and evening is a tremendous treasure. Don't take these things for granted. Don't miss out on the rains when you can have them. Don't live as if you're under a water ban. This is what you and I need—to be watered with God's word Sunday after Sunday and week after week. To be sprinkled and soaked with His living word. So turn on the hose and let it pour out into your lives. Read the Scriptures. Listen to them in the church. Speak about them with your family and your friends. Study the word and grow in it with other Christians.

Because God's word is not just information. It's not like a text book in school that you read through to study for the quiz. No, God's word is full of life and it does what it says. It delivers what He promises. This word, unlike every other word, is a word that comes from God. It comes from God even across time and space. Picture it like this: the Holy Scriptures are a rain cloud from God. It has traveled through centuries and across continents to reach you. To water your life so that you grow and live.

And God assures us that His word is effective. Just as the rain gives life to the earth at His command, so His word nourishes and gives spiritual life. **THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND ACTIVE, SHARPER THAN ANY TWO-EDGED SWORD, PIERCING TO THE DIVISION OF SOUL AND SPIRIT, OF JOINTS AND OF MARROW, AND**

DISCERNING THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS OF THE HEART. AND NO CREATURE IS HIDDEN FROM HIS SIGHT (Heb 4:12–13). This is what God's word does. It exposes our sin. It opens us up. It softens our hearts. It feeds our soul. It gives us life with Jesus.

And that's what God promises. That's what He means when He says through the prophet Isaiah: FOR AS THE RAIN AND THE SNOW COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND DON'T 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 PUPROSE AND SHALL SUCCEED IN THE THING FOR WHICH I SENT IT (vv 10–11). Whether we feel it or not, that's what God promises is happening in His word. It's doing His work in our lives. His word is accomplishing His purposes.

III.

And what is God's purpose? Is it not to give you life? To save you from sin and death and the devil? To bring forth in your life good fruit? Absolutely! And He promises that it will happen as His word falls down on your life, as it goes into your ears and sinks into your heart it will do these things. Because God's word has what we can't find anywhere else, a gift that we can't find in any other place. In God's word, we hear about, we come to know, and we meet Jesus Christ. What Simon Peter told Jesus is true also for us: "LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE, AND WE'VE BELIEVED AND HAVE COME TO KNOW, THAT YOU ARE THE HOLY ONE OF GOD" (Jn 6:68–69).

And how have we believed and come to know this? Through the word. By hearing what God says, what He tells us about His Son Jesus Christ. We know through the word that He is our Lord, who was born of Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, who was crucified, died, and buried, who rose again on the third day, who even now lives and reigns. We know this through the word. And we receive this forgiveness of sins through the word. The word is how God connects with us sinners who are dying. Through His word, He forgives our sins. Through His word, He gives us a life that will never end. Through His word, He gives us strength in temptation and victory over the devil.

After speaking about God's word, that's why Isaiah says, YOU SHALL GO OUT IN JOY — the joy of our redemption in Christ. He accomplished it fully and freely and has made it known in His word. That joy belongs to you. When you don't feel it, dig into

His word. Let your roots go down and soak up His love, His forgiveness, and His salvation.

He also says through Isaiah that you shall BE LED FORTH IN PEACE. We have peace with God, of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that we aren't God's enemies. He has reconciled us through the blood of His own Son. This is what God does and accomplishes through His word. It's why He sends that rain cloud over us through time and space, over our church and over our homes. To soak our lives with His word, so that we know the life that never ends.

Those whom He makes alive by His word will live forever. We will have life. We will grow. We will flourish. Even if now you feel like you live in the middle of a world that's dry and in the harshest conditions, we know what lies ahead. He will bring us into our own land. He will plant us in a new heaven and a new earth.

We pray today, "Make us alive with Your word, O Lord," and He does. Right now by His word, each day by His word, and forever—by His word.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7