

## My Word will not Return Void

### Isaiah 55

**Welcome** – in person and online as we gather in the name of Jesus and under authority of His Word.

**This is the 58<sup>th</sup> time and final time I'll say it: "Turn to the book Isaiah."**

**\*This is our final sermon** in what is perhaps the most important and influential series I've ever had the privilege to be a part.

\*It was a series that almost didn't happen (because of the size and magnitude), but I can honestly say it has been one of the great joys of ministry.

\*There is a **joy to see it come to an end**, but also a **tinge of sadness** to leave the pages (Perhaps how a **dad feels when he marries off a daughter.**)

\*Our series began **18 months ago, Oct. 2019**, before **face coverings or global pandemics**.

\*Through **personal fear**, Isaiah has been there pointing us to **faith**.

\*Through **political uncertainty**, Isaiah has been there pointing us to **confidence**.

\*Through **national instability**, Isaiah has been there pointing us to **stability**.

\*I am thankful that for 18 months **Isaiah has been a best friend through the worst of times**.

**If you are new, here is the summary of our journey:**

- **The Key message (primary conviction) of Isaiah: "God's Unfolding Plan."**

*\*God has a plan, it's unfolding in history, and nobody can stop Him.*

- **The Key Scripture (preached the 1<sup>st</sup> week of the series) is what God says in Isaiah 46:8-11.**

*"Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, 9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it."*

- **The chapters of Isaiah have been ordered around 8 unique themes that emerge:**

- *The Problem of Sin*
- *The Arrival of Messiah*
- *The Hope of Redemption*
- *The Life & Death of Messiah*
- *The Calling of Believers*
- *The Promises of God*
- *The Judgment of Enemies*
- *The Coming Kingdom*

\*From the very start of the series, I knew that only one chapter would serve as the **best and final conclusion to the series**. It is the **bookend** to God's Unfolding Plan in history:

**Isaiah 55: "My Word will not Return Void."**

**1. Instructions to Obey. (v.1-7)**

- *Come freely.* (v.1-2a)
- *Listen diligently.* (v.2b-5)
- *Seek urgently.* (v.6-7)

*"Come, everyone who thirsts, **come** to the waters; and he who has no money, **come**, buy and eat! **Come**, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

**\*v.1 is very near to God's heart.** It reveals his **character and his desire for all people know him.**

\*In fact, the chapter heading in ESV: **"The Compassion of the Lord."**

\*It is an invitation to the spiritually thirsty; invitation to weary souls; invitation to be satisfied

\*It is so important to God's heart that Jesus quotes it:

*"If anyone thirsts, let him **come to me and drink.**" (John 7:37)*

\*And it is so important, God gives humanity one final invitation on the last page of Bible:

*"The Spirit and the Bride say, **"Come."** And let the one who hears say, **"Come."** And let the **one who is thirsty come**; let the one who desires take **the water of life without price.**" (Rev 22:17)*

\*By now you realize **most invitations eventually cost:** Graduations; Weddings; Fund Raisers;

**\*Last week, my son was watching TV at grandmas, signed up for a national ministry, gave our address, and thought they would be sending "a bag of goodies"**

\*When the 'bag of goodies' came he was sorely disappointed because it was an envelope with a **donation opportunity.**

\*But hear this: **The best invitation in life is truly free. Without money. Without cost.**

\*If you're **broke**, you can still come. If you're **wealthy**, your money won't be accepted.

\*It's not something you can buy. It's not something you can afford.

**\*It's free...but make no mistake: it wasn't cheap.** It cost the life of the Son of God.

\*Now, **God has a question:**

*2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

**\*The problem is: We spend Time and Money** on things that ultimately leave us empty.

\*We squander money on things that leave us more unsatisfied than ever.

\*We spend our labors to accumulate possessions that ultimately disappoint.

\*In the words of the 1980 country song: *“Looking for love in all the wrong places.”*

**\*Haven’t we all done that?** It is so tempting to think **the next purchase will satisfy; the next relationship will satisfy; a second home will satisfy; the next vacation will satisfy;**

\*And then we wake up and realize all those vacations are just **stamps in the passport;** and that **prized possession now requires expensive maintenance.**

**\*Reminds me of the Calvin and Hobbes Cartoon:**

**Calvin:** *“Getting is better than having. When you **GET** something it’s new and exciting. When you **HAVE** something you take it for granted and it’s boring.”*

**Hobbes adds insight:** *“But everything you **get** turns into something you **have.**”*

**Calvin:** *“That’s why you always need to get new things.”*

\*That’s the problem with the human heart: We are **always getting but never satisfied.**

\*The Lord offers a much better invitation: one that **is free and available to all:**

*Come...all who are thirsty...and drink from the streams of living water.*

*2...Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. 3 Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant...”*

\*Do you realize it is possible to **hear...but not actually listen?**

\*A big challenge of **parenting**, getting children to move from **hearing – listening.**

\*A big challenge of **remote learning**, getting students: **information – transformation.**

**\*It happens in church every Sunday.** People hear...but don’t listen.

\*In 21 years of preaching, I’ve watched people **fall asleep; read novels; zone out; text friends; post on social media.**

\*And yet the same sermons, I’ve watched others **listen intently; jot notes; sit on the edge of their seats; tears streaming down face; make life altering decisions.**

\*What’s the difference? **Same sermon...same room...?**

**Hearing** is about **proximity** in the room; **Listening** is about **posture of the heart.**

And some people are **always hearing, never understanding.** (Mk. 4; Isaiah 6)

\*This is **the story of one man from NH, who attended church every Sunday as a kid...year after year...from Awana to his 20’s...always hearing, never understanding.**

\*Then came the day he accepted the invitation to Christ and received the Holy Spirit.

\*He said: *From that day on, every Sunday he would weep through worship; he was hungry for the word; it was like the sermon was crafted just for him.*

\*Listen: The Lord calls us to **listen** and promises for those who do: "...*your soul may live.*"

6 **"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;** 7 let the wicked **forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

\*These are great memory verses! Great verses for the fridge; great verses to teach children.

\*These verses are like **warning lights on dash telling you your car is overheating**

\*You need to **stop, pull the car over, and address the issue...**or risk further damage.

\*The **lights on the dash:** *"Seek the Lord; Call upon Him; Forsake old ways; Return to the Lord."*

\*What He calls for is not just a **change of action, but a change of thoughts.**

\*When should we take action? When it's convenient? When our schedule opens?

NO. *"While he may be found" and "while he is near."*

\*IOW: God says to **"Do it NOW; before it's too late!"**

\*There is a sense of urgency to respond **while we have opportunity...while there is an open window...**because one day that opportunity will be gone.

\*Some people **miss the open window because they die;** others miss it because they **grow stubborn;** and one day Christ will return and that window will close for good.

\*Years ago at The Promise, a room was full of people who were praying to receive Christ, I heard a knock at the door. Two women were outside: **"Are we too late?"**

\*New Hope, hear the urgency: **"TODAY, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts"**

\*Change your direction; Return to the Lord; **He will give compassion and abundantly pardon.**

## 2. Comforts to Embrace (v.8-11)

- *The ways of God.* (v.8-9)
- *The word of God.* (v.10-11)

8 For **my thoughts** are not your thoughts, neither are your ways **my ways,** declares the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are **higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

\***Famous verse alert!** Christians pray this in times of **difficulty.** In times of **uncertainty** we lean on this. When we don't understand **WHAT God is doing** or **WHY God allows something.**

\*When we face trials, we are **too close to the situation** and have **too little information.**

\*These words remind us that even when life seems like **random, chaotic brush strokes,** our God sees the big picture and one day a gorgeous painting will emerge under His watchful hand.

\*For One NH woman, this has been HER COMFORT through the darkest seasons of life:

**"God, you knew this day was coming! You knew this day was coming!"**

**\*Listen; for people here who feel that life is out of control, or confused on what God is up to, or feeling like there is no hope, let the words of Isaiah comfort you as you wait:**

*“God’s ways are higher than mine; His thoughts are higher; He knows what He’s doing.”*

10 *“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 11 **so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall...**”*

\*The Lord gives an **analogy** of Rain and Snow descending to water the earth and make it green.

**\*The analogy is to show:** God says that His word does the same thing. **When it descends:**

*“It shall **NOT return** to me **empty**.*

*It shall **accomplish** that which I purpose.*

*It shall **succeed** in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)*

**\*I pray this almost every Sunday as COMFORT before I preach. My sole confidence is: God loves His Word and when it is proclaimed, God promises it will succeed in His purposes**

\*Even when **the delivery is cumbersome**; even when **the congregation seems distracted**; even when **growth seems imperceptible**; His Word will prove effective.

\*Even this morning, God is watching over His Word to accomplish His purposes.

**\*Decisions will be made; Broken hearts will be comforted; Sinful hearts will change.**

### **3. Promise to Believe (v.12-13)**

12 *“For you shall go out in **joy** and be led forth in **peace**; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all **the trees of the field shall clap their hands**. 13 *Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”**

\*IOW: It’s a picture of **total transformation. Global renewal.** Creation explodes in praise.

\*This is the final picture after **58 sermons in Isaiah, showing God’s ultimate promise**

\*He will **reverse the curse**, and lead all of creation in a processional of **Joy and Peace**.

\*Gone will be the days of **“thorns and briers”** – **symbols** of trials that pierce the soul with pain.

\*Arrived will be days of **“cypress and myrtle”** – **symbols** of life that spread to every corner.

**\*Mountains** are pictured as **singing**; **Trees** are pictured as **“clapping their hands.”**

**(If you like the Gaither’s, these verses inspired their song: “Trees of the Field.”)**

**\*It’s taken 18 months and 58 sermons...and it all ends with this promise:**

*\*God has a plan, it’s unfolding in history, and one day all of Creation will rejoice because trials will be gone, Christ will be exalted, the enemy is defeated, and heaven will be home*

## Action Steps:

- **Distribute some “Spinach”**

- \*One **New Hope** couple sent in a financial gift this week, along with a **Popeye Label:**

- “To Pastor Craig: Some Spinach for the Church”*

- \*How does this relate to Is. 55?

- \*God asks in Isaiah 55 “why” we spend **time and money** on things that don’t satisfy.

- \*I find it fascinating that this chapter is quoted in the **most famous passage on generosity**, when Paul encourages Christians to be **generous**.

- “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...**He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.**” (2 Cor. 9:6,10)*

- \*Let me encourage you: **release possessions, rethink purchases, and distribute Spinach.**

- \*If you are stuck in a **cycle of “Getting and Having”** the best way to break free is through **GIVING and RELEASING.**

- **Be a Hearer...and Doer.**

- \*God calls us to move from **Hearing to Listening.** As my former pastor used to say: ***The moment of conviction is the moment of decision.***

- \*The Lord invites us to **COME...**and be satisfied.

- \*To **Listen...**that your soul may live.

- \*To **Seek...**and He will abundantly pardon.

- \*He calls us to **change our ways...and our thinking.**

- \*There are things He calls us to do; we can’t put off; it’s not wise to delay.

- \*Call upon the Lord while He may be found. That’s today!*

- **Trust the One who paints the canvas of history.**

- \*When the brush strokes of life seem **chaotic or confusing**, we trust the **Master Artist.**

- \*When we don’t understand what God is doing, we trust His ways are higher than ours.

- \*When we are afraid, we trust the one who promised His word will not return void.

- \*We trust the one who will reverse the curse and lead all of creation in a processional of joy because the enemy will be defeated and Christ will be exalted as King of Kings.