

## Isaiah 55.6-13

- <sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;
- <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake their way,  
and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- <sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
- <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- <sup>10</sup> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
- <sup>11</sup> 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.
- <sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
- <sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Father God,  
Your promise is that your word will go forth and achieve your purpose before it returns to you.  
Please speak to us through your word this morning and achieve your good purposes in our lives.  
In Jesus name  
Amen

This summer we are looking at bible passages to learn and live by. Today we have 3 for the price of 1!

*<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near.*

*<sup>10</sup> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven...*

*<sup>11</sup> 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...*

*<sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace*

All three come from Isaiah chapter 55; the closing words of the second section of the prophet's work.

Let's remind ourselves of the context:

Isaiah was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

He forewarned the Israelites that God had judged them for their abandoning of God and that they would suffer exile in Babylon.

But he also looked forward to the time when God would say:

*"Enough is enough! Out of pity for you and for my glory, I'm going to restore you to the Promised Land once again."*

The book of Isaiah is very much a book of two (or three!) halves – the first full of warning, doom and gloom, but the second filled with hope that in the end all would be well.

So, in our passage today from Isaiah 55 Isaiah looks forward to the time when the people of Israel will be sat by the rivers of Babylon, weeping.

They will have lost everything – their homes and livelihoods; their sense of identity as the people of God, the Temple as the place where God's glory dwelt.

They will have lost even their freedom; carried off to a strange and foreign land.

And Isaiah says to them –

*“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.  
let the wicked forsake their way and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
Let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,  
And to our God for he will freely pardon”*

How strange a thought this must have been to the Israelites, so far from the Promised Land, from Zion City of their God, from the Temple where his glory dwelt.

How they must have thought –

*“Turn to God here...in Babylon?  
It’s not possible!  
He’s abandoned us, we are on our own, there is no hope!”*

But says God, through the prophet Isaiah,

*“I’m a bit cleverer than you!”  
“My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways”.  
When my words go out from my mouth, they achieve the purpose for which I  
sent them.  
Like the rain and snow coming down and watering the earth; bringing life  
where all seemed dead; so my word goes out and brings life.  
You might find it hard to believe but I’ve spoken and I am going to restore you.*

So our passage then concludes with one of the most uplifting of all passages of Scripture:

*<sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

The earth is going to be filled with such joy that even the mountains will sing and the trees clap.

Wow!

Now these three passages in one, to learn and live by, might speak to us on any number of levels.

How I wonder, might they speak to you today...and on into the future?

Maybe for some of us today, God is reminding us that he is simply bigger than we are:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts” says the Lord.

For the Israelites in exile in Babylon, accustomed to thinking of God as located in Jerusalem and specifically in the Temple, it must have been hard to believe that he was with them in Babylon.

For these Israelites, accustomed to thinking that God had promised his people security in the Promised Land it must have been hard not to think it was all over: God had been defeated by a stronger power, or he had been unfaithful to his promise, or he had got so fed up with them he had abandoned them. How disorientated and despairing they must have been.

But God is all powerful; he is faithful, and he is working his purpose out. Maybe not in the way the Israelites expected; but in His way.

He has had to bring the Israelites up short; he has had to allow them to reap the consequences of their apostasy,

But he is *not* going to allow a little thing like his people’s disobedience to stand in the way of his achieving his purpose.

He has spoken and his purposes will come to pass.

Maybe, then, some of us need to be reminded that God is bigger than us.

We might not always get what he is up to.

Sometimes things don’t look good.

But no one thwarts the purposes of our God.

One day, every knee will bow before him; every tongue confess he is Lord; the devil will be defeated; there will be no pain or hunger or even death; and all creation will find its goal in Him.

Hallelujah!

For some of us today, our passage to learn and live by might be a call, in the light of this, to return to the Lord...while he may be found.

God is patient, but his patience will not last forever.

*Seek the LORD while he may be found,*

*call upon him while he is near;*

*<sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake their way,*

*and the unrighteous their thoughts;*

*let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,*

*and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

If there is sin in your life,

If the thoughts you entertain in your head are evil,

Then now is the time to repent of them; to turn away and to turn to God.

Jesus was very clear that if your hand or eye causes you to sin you are best off cutting it off or gouging it out (metaphorically).

Its better to enter heaven without them than to miss heaven completely.

Maybe God is saying to some of you: enough is enough. Deal with your sin, whilst there is still time. Repent and come to me, for I am a merciful God and I will give you pardon.

But maybe for some of you here today, you think, “God could never forgive me. What I’ve done is too bad.”

God says to you through this passage: Not true!

The devil would have you believe it. He would have you despair of ever being free of what you have done in the past; of being forgiven, putting things right and starting again.

But look at what Isaiah says: to those who return to the Lord, God will show mercy. He will abundantly pardon – not grudgingly or sparingly – but abundantly.

“God gave up his own Son for you, will surely give you everything along with him.” says St Paul.

On a different tack, maybe God is saying to some here today: “Have confidence in my Word.”

That may be for us personally – that God would encourage us to believe on his promises as revealed in Scripture or through words of prophesy given to us through the Spirit’s power.

Or it may be that we would have confidence in God’s word to change and help those around us.

Have we lost confidence that when we speak words of the bible to people; when we share the good news of Jesus, anything will happen?

God is clear – his word *always* achieves the purpose for which he sent it.

Finally, maybe today God is reminding some of us of the wonderful future that awaits us.

I do find it hard to see older people struggling with failing health, and it seems increasingly with dementia.

Old age, for some, does not seem to bring much joy.

But our passage today is clear:

*<sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

*<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

For the followers of Jesus, death is something to be welcomed.

“For me to live is Christ” writes St Paul, “and to die is gain” (Philippians 1.21)

“It is better for me to die and be with the Lord, but it is better for you if I stay with you” he writes to the Christians in Philippi (Philippians 1.23).

I do think we need to recover the eager expectation that what awaits us when we die is better than what we have now.

Our passage from Isaiah, through the lens of God’s people being restored from exile to the Promised Land, gives us a vision of heaven.

Of the time when the whole earth will rejoice in the presence of God.

Maybe God is saying to some of you – lift your eyes up... a day is coming when all will be well. Don't be fearful; look with eager hope and anticipation.

What is God saying to you today....

Let's pray....