

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-17 Spiritual Encounters: God's Promise Concerning His Word

A story coming from West Africa on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert talks about the farmer's tears. In his hut, he carefully saves the millet seed in a sack. The dry season has been long. The grain from the last harvest is almost gone. They can eat just one meal a day. His wife and children in their hut are nearly starving. He sees the swollen stomachs of the little ones who are crying for food. Some of them may die. He sheds tears for them. It would be so easy to take the seed grain and give them something to eat. But then he would have nothing to sow when the rains came again. So he waits. When the time comes to sow the seed, he sows with tears, remembering the child who perished for lack of food. He sows in hope and has faith in the rains and faith in the soil. He believes there will be a harvest again. The farmer's struggle illustrates the truth of the scripture, "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them" (Ps 126:5-6).

Your previous lesson was based on the farming example given in the Parable of the Sower. You realized that the 'seed' that is sown, according to Jesus, is the Word of God. It is the story of our salvation through the Cross of Jesus Christ. Witnessing is sowing the seed—telling that story. We testify about his life (incarnation), death (crucifixion), and resurrection (new life), and all that they means for us as believers.

A similar farming theme can be found in Isaiah 55. The prophet is inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit to call God's rebellious people back. He wants to restore the people to their rightful place in God's kingdom. This restoration is a picture of salvation. Isaiah begins with the idea of thirsting. The thirsty people are called to return to the Lord. If they do, they will be satisfied by receiving provision of food and drink without cost.

The Spirit speaks through the prophet, saying: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon" (Isa 55:6-7). The major theme of this passage is very similar to the Parable of the Sower. The focus is on evangelism with its underlying themes of repentance and redemption. This includes the idea of the witness's assurance in sowing and reaping, that God's Word has power to save.

Such certainty regarding the effectiveness of God's Word flows from the awesome reality of God's rule and reign. His power and authority go far beyond our human understanding or knowing. God continues to explain: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8-9).

Flowing from the reality of his great power and majesty, beyond anything we can even understand, the Spirit goes on. He uses another farming example and speaks of a certainty in nature: "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, 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" (Isa 55:10-11).

The hearers are challenged with the certainty of God's authority through his Word. We can see the effects of rain and snow on the earth. They are common parts of nature that God uses day after day, season after season, to sustain the earth. They have a certainty throughout the ages that is never-ending, consistent, and without question. So it is with God's Word. It will not return to him without yielding a response. It will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sends it. The Word of the Lord to us, through the Spirit-inspired prophet Isaiah, should give us confidence in our witnessing to others. After all it is not **our** word that we speak, but the Word of the Living God.

There is an element of mystery to the things of the Lord, but there is also an element of certainty. He will always do what he says he will do; his Word is effective in the world. It is as fixed as the rain and the snow and the other common elements around us. As people of faith, we need to trust and be confident that his Word will indeed go forth and yield fruit in the lives of the people.

When we speak the Word of God to people, we share the story of salvation through his Son, Jesus. We must be confident, regardless of the outward circumstances or appearances, that it is having an effect. We must be settled in our hearts that it will be powerful. It will accomplish the purpose for which God sends it—repentance and redemption in the lives of unbelievers. We, God's people, are the ones sowing the seed near and far. We are his voice among the nations, among those who are lost. We are the means he uses to bring the Word of the Lord to their hearing. He wants to impact their hearts, so they will turn from their wicked ways. They will begin to seek him, as the prophet Isaiah says, and call upon him and be saved.

This passage ends in prophetic description of a wonderful result of the effect of the Word of God spread by his people: "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever" (Isa 55:12–13). The result of the acceptance of God's Word is joy and inner peace. All of this will be for the Lord's glory, not our own. It will be an everlasting sign of God's goodness among his people when the new heavens and new earth come. It points forward to the promise of a thorn-less future world.

This lesson is **important** because it explains God's promise through Isaiah to us, God's people. The promise concerns the assurance and power of his Word in sowing and reaping. Though some may sow with tears, the harvest is certain. This is what evangelism is all about. If we are faithful to sow the good seed of the Word, God is faithful to bring a harvest.

The **main truth** is that we need to trust that God's Word will not return empty or void, but will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sends it.

Review Questions

1. According to the lesson, what is the major theme of the Isaiah 55 passage? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "The major theme is evangelism, including the idea of the certainty of reaping when God's Word is sown," you are correct.
2. What does Isaiah 55 tell us about the effectiveness of God's Word? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "God's Word will not return to him without yielding a response, but it will

accomplish the purpose for which he sends it,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it a few times and try to tell the story of the African farmer in your own words. How does your understanding of Isaiah 55 help you to have confidence in God’s Word as you witness to others? Gather some of your friends and tell them what you have learned in this lesson. Ask them, “Can you think of a time in your life where you have seen God’s Word come to pass, even when you thought it might be impossible for such a thing to happen? How does your memory of this event help faith to rise in your own heart regarding the promises in God’s word?”