

Isaiah 55: Why Do I Need the Bible?

(this transcript has been lightly edited for readability)

You probably know me as the person who writes on marriage and parenting and other Christian life issues. But the thing that really excites me, that gets me up in the morning, that motivates me to do what I do is the Word of God. I think of myself as a Bible teacher, that everything I write about emerges from the study of God's Word.

And so I am excited to launch this journey with you. We call it “The Gospel: One Chapter At A Time,” where we’re going to trace the redemptive story through every book of the Bible. The first time through, we’re going to do summaries of the various books in Scripture, and then we’ll go back and begin to look at the first chapter of every book of the Bible.

But before we begin that, I want to do some preparatory things that ask the question, “Why do I need to study the Bible? What is the Bible actually about? What will the Bible do for me?” And then when we cover those things, we’ll then launch into the study of the various books of Scripture.

I want to take you to a passage that really does address the question, “Why do I need the Bible in my life?” It’s Isaiah 55; I’m going to read verses 10 through 13:

For as the rain and 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, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. 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. 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 shall not be cut off.

You've all heard somebody teach that the Word of God will never return void but will accomplish its purpose. When I hear someone teach on that passage without teaching on what follows, I go crazy. Because if I said to you, "I will always accomplish my purpose in your life," what would your next question be? "What in the world is your purpose?" That could be a scary thing to say.

Well, this passage does that. It uses this weird word picture that once you understand it, you get everything that the Bible is about. It is the word picture of rain and snow watering plants. It says when the rain and the snow come down watering these plants, now listen to the weirdness of this, "instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle."

Now think about this, if I have a thorn bush in my back yard and it's nourished by the rain and the snow, what do I expect to get? I don't expect to get a myrtle tree; I expect to get a larger thorn bush. It's a word picture that makes no sense. If I have a brier in my back yard and it gets nourished by rain and snow, the only thing I would expect is a bigger brier. What Isaiah is doing is it's pushing this metaphor to let us know what the Word of God is about.

The Word of God has as its primary purpose the transformation of our hearts, and in the transformation of our hearts, the transformation of our lives. Not that we become bigger and better of what we are, but we become fundamentally different than we could ever have been apart from the Word of God. The theology of the Word of God is never an end in itself. The stories of the Word of God are never an end in itself. The wisdom principles of the Word of God are never an end in themselves; they're always a means to an end, and the end is the transforming power of God's grace. When the Word of God is brought to you by the Spirit of God, propelled by the grace of God, the result should be heart and life transformation.

You need the Word of God in your life because you need to be transformed. All of us still have the artifacts of sin inside of us. All of us still need the power of transforming grace. If you're not satisfied with who you are, you're not satisfied with everything you say, everything you choose, everything that you decide, the ways that you act, then you need the Word of God every day in your life. It's God's powerful tool of personal transformation.

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