

“The Mouth of the Lord Has Spoken”

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I. Introduction

A. Read Passage (Isaiah 40:3-5)

B. Prayer of Illumination.

Well, as we start to take down our Christmas decorations, though probably not just yet, we begin to set our eyes forward to the New Year, to 2021. Hard to believe, right? With 2020 being the kind of year that it was, undoubtedly one none of us will soon forget, many have asserted, and with good intentions, that 2021 will be the year where we get things back to normal, that 2021 is when we can finally put all of this chaos, uncertainty, dread, and disease behind us and get back to life as it was before Covid-19. And I hope that it is. I would love to be able to go to Avenue Bread after church today, sit down at a table inside and order my French Dip sandwich, you know, the one with the house-roasted beef, swiss cheese, caramelized onions, and a side of “au jus”—it’s delicious. However, brothers and sisters, I regret to tell you that I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, so I can’t tell you before God that such will be the case or will not be the case. *Nevertheless, this morning as we look back at the words of the prophet Isaiah, I think we’ll find encouragement for today and for the future, whatever it holds, because we’ll learn about the God who has not only spoken truly but has acted powerfully on behalf of His people in tumultuous, uncertain times.* In an age where mandates, policies, and plans are changing at a dizzying rate, we’ll find encouragement in the God who never changes, and we’ll find encouragement in His word, which, while ancient, is more relevant to us today than we can imagine. Isaiah will show us that there are many reasons to believe that God is trustworthy, even, or perhaps especially in the complexity of our lives. And this leads us to our first point, our first of three.

II. Point 1: We can trust God, because His word is true.

Now if you have been in the church for some time or if you have ever read any of the gospel accounts in the New Testament then you probably recognized our passage that we read. Or, if you’ve heard Handel’s Messiah, there are three beautiful songs in the beginning of the work that also include Isaiah’s words here. *And, especially this time of year we’re used to automatically seeing the fulfillment of these words in John the Baptist, that forerunner of the Messiah, of whom Jesus said “among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* But these words first show up not in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, but in the Old Testament, in Isaiah.

So, when Isaiah was prophesying to Judah and Jerusalem, they were steeped in all kinds of wickedness, they had turned from the LORD by worshiping idols, they were oppressing the poor of the land, and they were guilty of making political alliances with Egypt, trusting in them rather than the LORD for protection from Assyria. Because of all of this and after the LORD had warned them over and over, He finally declared that He would send them into exile to Babylon for their rebellion. *It was in every way a dark period in the life of the people of God.* You could imagine the questions that were coming into their minds, both when they first heard of God's coming judgment and when the exile actually occurred: *"Have we been forsaken by God? Did we really blow it this time?" Or, "How is this happening? Is the LORD really the Lord of history? Is He able to do anything about this exile? And if He's able, is He willing? Is it perhaps time that we look somewhere else for our rescue?"* And it's in that context that Isaiah utters the word of the LORD, that though they would go into exile, that He would in time deliver them and bring them back to Jerusalem. It's in that context that we hear that a voice cries: *"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* *But would God make a way in that arid, Syrian desert? Would He make good on His promise?* The Almighty in His sovereignty stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, who had conquered Babylon, and he sent the Judean people back into Jerusalem through the desert, just as the mouth of the LORD had spoken. The people saw the glorious power of the LORD when, against all human odds, He brought them back into the land. And what guaranteed that such an event would happen but that the mouth of the LORD had spoken. His word was vividly and powerfully shown to be true.

Brothers and sisters, the issue of truth is especially in crisis today. We hear many voices telling us what to believe about truth, that it's all reducible to "my truth" or "your truth," which ultimately means that there's no real truth out there, or if there is, that it isn't knowable. *Not only that, but we hear all kinds of voices in the world and sometimes in our own heart speaking falsehoods, telling us to doubt God's goodness toward us, to doubt His faithfulness to keep His promises to us; or that somehow the good life is found everywhere except in obedience to God.* Or perhaps we hear our hearts condemning us, telling us that we've failed one-too-many times in the sight of God and that we have no salvation to look forward to. *I am here to tell you this morning that God is faithful, that God is true, that God is merciful, and that God can be trusted in.* Jeremiah 10:10 says, "But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King." We hear in Numbers 23:19: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. *Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"* In John 17:17, in His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus says, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Can you imagine the people coming out of the Babylonian exile when they looked back to Isaiah's words? They must've thought: "Wow, God really did make a way in the desert. He kept His word to us." And God will keep His word to you. This entire book contains His word to us. And this word to us remains rock solid, true through the ages, it remains steadfast *even when we aren't*. So, this year let us pick up this book and read. And let us cast

aside any other voices we may be trusting in that promise us the good life outside of the gospel, let us cast aside our doubts about God's fatherly love and care for us, and let us cast aside all self-glorying and instead look to the word of this glorious God with the eyes of faith, with childlike trust; He promises never to let us down.

III. Point 2: We can trust God, because His word is timely.

We looked at Isaiah's prophecy to his original audience and how it manifested the absolute reliability of God's word. But we also know that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saw the grandest fulfillment of Isaiah's word in the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. If you recall, before the Messiah was sent into the world by God the Father, the nation of Israel had not heard any new revelation for 400 years. *For 400 years the people had not heard or seen the consolation and redemption they were eagerly anticipating. Instead, they were under Roman rule, they were being taught soul-crushing pharisaical traditions rather than the word of God, and, as we know from the gospel accounts, there was prolific demonic activity amongst them, even in the synagogues!* Israel looked radically different from when David or Solomon were on the throne. And they desperately needed God to act on their behalf.

And we're not unfamiliar with that experience, are we? We've likely all been in a desperate situation where we needed God to work mightily on our behalf, perhaps for our children, our jobs, our finances, our health, or perhaps we've found ourselves tangled up in a sinful habit we just can't seem to break on our own? *God sees. God knows. And He is both able and willing to help, and to help in the timeliest of ways.* Consider the timeliness of God's word to Abraham, how just when he took the knife to slaughter his son Isaac the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven to stop him, "Abraham, Abraham!", providing instead a ram as a burnt offering. Or consider the timeliest act of God in the sending of His Son. *In a time when it looked like spiritual darkness and oppression would overcome everyone and everything, the light of the world was revealed.* The Apostle Paul says, "For while we were still weak, *at the right time* Christ died for the ungodly." God's timely word, even the Word made flesh, has broken into history at just the right time for us, and we enjoy the forgiveness and life He brings by personally receiving and resting in Him alone. The glory of the Lord has been revealed to us in the face of Jesus Christ, and this free gift is available to all flesh, to anyone and everyone who believes.

But the timeliness of God and His word extends even further still. Are you wallowing in sadness over the affairs of this world? I encourage you to read the Psalms of David for a timely encouragement. Read Ps. 23, for example. Have you just sinned grievously before God and you want to know that He will forgive you when you confess your sins? Read Psalm 32 and 51 and see how God's Spirit works on your conscience. Are you anxious and fearful? Meditate on Paul's comments to the Philippians to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the

peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Are you facing a violent temptation? Open to 1 Corinthians 10 where we hear that “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” *Do you see how timely God’s word is to us? Do you see how necessary it is for all of faith and life?* Martin Luther summed up the matter well when he said, “I must place the Word of God above everything. I must hazard life and limb, the world’s favor, my property, honor, and all my welfare that I may keep it and cling to Christ as to my most precious Treasure in heaven and on earth.”

So, we see that the Lord’s word to us and to our children is neither cold nor lifeless. It’s not an ancient document devoid of connection to our own lives today, one whose relevance remains in ancient Judea or Galilee. It isn’t a relic of a bygone age, merely describing to us how an ancient community thought of the world around them. *What good would such a word be to us? That kind of word couldn’t offer hope in seasons of darkness and depression, it couldn’t offer instruction in how to respond to the moment we’re in.* Instead, we know that Scripture has been breathed out by God, that it is living, that it is active, that it is sharper than any two-edged sword, that in it God is revealing and reconciling sinners to Himself— and we know that this word is timely, that it has the power to minister to us in our deepest needs when they arise.

IV. Point 3: We can trust God, because His word is transformative.

Our final and briefest point this morning is really twofold, having to do with an inner and an outer transformation produced by the word of God. In preparing the way of the Lord, John the Baptist baptized the people and preached repentance and forgiveness of sins. “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance,” he says. *And we too, brothers and sisters, we are to remove every obstruction, we are to cast aside those sins which cling so closely, our spiritual pride, our indifference, our jealousy, our greed, our impatience, all of those sins which hinder our joyful progress in grace. Recognizing we are helpless to reconcile ourselves to God or to bring about holiness in our own hearts, we prepare the way not by looking within, but by looking outside of ourselves to the word of truth, and especially to the Holy Spirit as He makes the word fruitful in our hearts and in our lives.* We are invited to call out to the Lord that He would transform our desires and our actions and lead us in a way that is pleasing to Him. With David in Psalms 119 we can pray, “Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.” *If it’s inner renewal we want, we must seek out fellowship with God through meditation on His word and earnest prayer. And that includes sitting under the preaching of the gospel each Sunday.*

Now, God’s word also brings about transformation in a more external, even cosmic way. Remember in the beginning God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light! And the Word

of God incarnate, the God-Man Jesus Christ, remember at His word the blind received their sight, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, and the dead were raised up. John the Baptist, His herald and precursor, he announced the coming of the Lord, and we even today enjoy the fruits of His coming, evidenced by us gathering in this church this morning, a church which He purchased with His own blood. *But just as John announced His first advent, His first coming, we now no longer anticipate the voice of a prophet in the wilderness but the voice of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet of God. For we await His arrival from heaven in glory, both Him and the holy angels, and then He will bring about unspeakable transformation to the heavens and the earth, ushering in a new creation, and we will be raised imperishable, we will be raised in glory, no longer to experience the pollution of sin or the sorrows of suffering.* Instead, we will see His face and enjoy the blessed presence of God forevermore. So, as we enter this new year, let us remember that His word is true, His word is timely, and His word is transformative; let us put our hope and trust in Him.