

‘When God Speaks’ - Isa 55:11 – (Worship The Lord 17/8/14)

Good morning everyone. The theme we have been asked to reflect on this morning is, “When God Speaks”; and in the context of God’s words in Isa 55:11: “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.” In the increasingly hostile attitude of today’s Cayman to Christians, I find these words very reassuring. In fact, all of Isaiah 55, with that tremendous opening call to spiritual refreshment: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and *your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*”

Please pray with me as we consider God’s word. Eternal God, we thank You for Your holy Word, which, like Your mercies, is indeed new every morning. Open our minds and the eyes of our hearts now, we pray, so that we can each truly hear from You, so that our souls will indeed delight in the richest of fare, uplifting the downhearted, or filling that emptiness that all our frivolous strivings cannot satisfy. Renew us again with the Bread of Life and the Living Water so that we will always want to help others to also be filled with the fullness of Christ alone, in Whose name we humbly pray, with thanksgiving and anticipation. Amen

Isaiah 55:11 comes amongst those chapters with the wonderful prophecies of Christ, so it is quite familiar. But I admit when I was given the theme to go with it for today, *When God Speaks*, the thought that came to my mind was, When does God *not* speak to us?

Certainly, in the book of Isaiah you would not normally think of God *not* speaking, of God’s *silence*, as Isaiah seems filled with both the breadth *and depth* of God’s word. But to reflect on “*When God Speaks*” does seem to beg the question, When does God *not* speak? Is there something He is *silent* about, something He has *not said* to us? Surely we cannot try to say that the carnage in Gaza is because God has not spoken on the subjects at play in that? Or all the other wars, terrorist activities and atrocious violence in so many places. Or the conditions driving so many people to risk their lives in overloaded boats and floating junk, fleeing poverty in their homelands. So let’s look at some less historical issues, such as those in Cayman. Is the rise up of Sunday Trading once more because God has not spoken? Or children abuse? Are the objections to eliminating poverty-generating wages because God needs to say something on *that* subject? It is amazing that with more and more of our population not going to Church and in fact decrying Christianity, God, righteousness or anything like that, so many can still quote that *‘the poor you will always have with you’!* But, strange, I never hear anyone quoting what God had said 10 verses earlier in Deuteronomy, that, “*However, there should be no poor among you ... if only you fully obey the Lord your God ...!*” The other Biblical quotation, besides the one to salve our conscience about poverty, that people seem to have definitely heard is that *God is love*. But too often that is conveniently recalled in isolation as some sort of get off free card, without thought to whom and what the depth and breadth of God’s love encompasses. But is any of this because God has *not* spoken?

As I commented on this thought at home the other day, my daughter burst forth with the last verse of William Cowper's hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way", as her take on the jaded and un-Biblical view of everything, increasingly prevalent in Cayman today:

Blind *unbelief* is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain

Then my wife chimed in with a couple of lines from a Cowper poem that, impressively, she recalled from her school days. An anti-slavery poem he had written in 1788, almost half a century before abolition in the British territories, in which he has the slave pose this piercing question to elements of the Christian society of that day:

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
 Is there One who reigns on high?
Has He bid you buy and sell us,
 Speaking from his throne the sky?

In that hymn and that poem Cowper highlighted the two issues behind the apparent confusion we still face as to what we should do about the issues that plague us today, creating havoc or unjust marginalisation in so many lives. Namely, that it is not because God has not spoken. It is because so many in the smugness of their *unbelief* deride and laugh at any attempts to follow the fundamental righteousness of God's precepts. And because many who claim to be Christians (or, internationally, the other two followers of the God of Abraham) are quick to tell others that there is indeed a God on high, but because of greed, lust or other pleasures, we refuse to bow to the reality of that question Cowper posed to the 18th Century slave owners, Is this *really* what He bids you do? Is what you are doing really what Jesus would do? Yet we know full well the same emphatic answer Cowper's poem supplied, No.

'No, I admit this is not what Jesus would do.' 'No, this is not what God meant in all that He spoke to Abraham and his spiritual descendants to do.' Those principles and precepts summed up so succinctly for us through Micah, that it is not posturing, pious showmanship or correct-but-*unlived* evangelical words that God asks for, but simply *justice, mercy and humility*. No, it is not that God has not spoken on all these issues already. For as Micah says bluntly, He has *told* us – 'He has *told* us what is good and what He requires of us'. But, as it was 2,700 years ago when God spoke through Isaiah, Micah and Amos, or 2,000 years ago when He sent Jesus to us, or over 200 years ago when He moved Cowper to confront injustice, the world is still plagued by that smug *unbelief*, aggravated by our lapses as Believers, when we wiggle around what we *know* God *has told us*, out of fear, the pleasures of this world, greed.

And so the "famine of hearing the words of the Lord" that Amos spoke of, and the question of the Psalmist, "How long will You hide Your face", still echo around in the emptiness of a now overcrowded world, where *inequity* still trumps *integrity* to God's precepts, and personal *pleasures* still bend *principles*, where *haughty unbelief* still precludes the *humility* required to walk with God. Consequently, justice and mercy elude even our best intentions.

However, the Psalmist and the prophets always recognised that in those bleak times that appeared so Godless it was not that *God* refused to give direction or hid His face. But as Isaiah 59: 2 tells them, “*your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you. ... So justice is driven back, righteousness stands at a distance, truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.*” If you have ever looked at the comments online locally when anyone tries to suggest moral living, you will have seen how the pack rips them apart exactly as Isaiah pictured it.

That is why Christians must also heed the words of God when He speaks directly to us from Isaiah 51 to “Hear me, *you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults.*” We must hold on to the courage of our convictions. God expects us as Christians to be *strong and steadfast*. “Look to the *rock* from which you were cut and to the *quarry* from which you were *hewn*” He says. Solid as a rock. Not flotsam washing back and forth with the shifting tides of popularity. For God reassures us it has been that way for thousands of years but those who attack and parody His precepts will soon be gone, leaving nothing of lasting value. However, *His* righteousness has rescued people for eons already and “*will last forever*”, *His* “*salvation through all generations.*”

And so we come back to the reassurance that God *has* spoken; and our text today, in Isaiah 55: 10 and 11 tells us what happens *When God Speaks*:

“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.*”

There is a lot crammed into this one sentence! Even a science lesson – on how by their transpiration process plants take in the water from the rain, use a small fraction to feed themselves fully, and then let off the rest, which is absorbed by the atmosphere and returns to the clouds to start the cycle over! And that is not the only image of the sufficiency of what God provides. As God points out in that verse, when the rains give the plants renewed life, they provide both food for people to eat there and then, as well as *seed for more planting*, to keep on feeding us and others in future.

And God says, *so does His word*. It feeds us and it provides seeds for us to plant so others can be fed with the living Bread, Christ. And we must remember that in Isaiah many of the words often have a double meaning, usually pointing to imminent redemption for God’s people from their then exile but also pointing beyond that to the *ultimate* redemption by Christ. And in this verse 11 “the word” that proceeds from God and returns only after accomplishing His purpose can be taken as both God’s message to the people that keeps going and is still the message for us to live by today. But also the *Word made flesh*, Christ, Who came and accomplished the ultimate purpose of God, conquering evil and death and making salvation freely available to all of us who believe, before He returned to God in Heaven.

Therefore we can rejoice in *hope* this morning, for God *has* spoken; and *When God speaks* His purpose *is achieved*. We do not have to fear that it will not, just because so many people are now opposing it. It will be accomplished. As believers we just have to retain our integrity of faith and obey God, *with conviction*. And if you are beset by personal problems, serious illness, grief, God has also spoken to you from Isaiah as well, with the loving assurance that when we go through all and any kinds of trials, "*I will be with you*". And for anyone who has not yet put your trust in God in Christ, God has spoken to you also and included you in that great promise of Isa 55; 11, calling on you in verse 6 to "*Seek the Lord while He may be found*", while you are still alive. "*Turn to the Lord*", He says, "and He will have mercy on [you], and to our God, for He will freely pardon." For what God wants is that we will *all* be made *alive* by drinking of His Word, and then all of us "*will go out in joy and be led forth in peace*". Will *you* follow Him? Amen.