

## **May/June 2017 Preach the Word**

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Supplemental sermon on Isaiah 55:10-11

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“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Is that true? Or is it true that “The pen is mightier than the sword”? Both maxims are used so often we’ve all heard them. Everyone has, right? Which one is true? Do words have no power or are they more powerful than armies and tanks? Which is it?

### **What Good Are Words?**

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Amen.

What good are words? This week, nearly 200 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders came together for Camp South, plus all of their chaperones. Now understand this, each of them paid \$275, plus they travelled, some from hundreds and hundreds of miles away. The chaperones gave up a full week of work, a full week of their summer, just to come to this camp that has as its purpose gathering around God’s Word. Sure, there was a ton of fun stuff that went on, but if you look at the schedule, it’s clear why we were all there – from the two worship times each day, 45 minutes every morning and evening to the 75 minute Bible study each afternoon, to the small group reflection and prayer time each night. By the end of the week, even meal times started becoming worship as the kids started spontaneously singing “Father, I Adore you” as the workers and campers from other groups wondered what was going on. Remember, these are middle-schoolers we’re talking about – too cool to pull their noses out of their phones normally – too cool to give much more than a grunt in answer to your questions on a regular day – and they are choosing to sing God’s praises in front of strangers. How did that...happen??!?

Or take Chris and Jon. Today marks their last day here with us for this summer. They came here about 10 weeks ago as part of this Summer Ministry Assistant program, and have been working their tails off all summer helping us fulfill our mission as a church. Sure, they get a stipend for their schooling in return, but not nearly as much as they would have made at most summer jobs. And these are both gifted guys – they could have gotten something that paid way better. But they sacrificed to be here, away from family and friends - all summer long. Why?

The answer to both Camp South and Chris and Jon is the same. It’s the same answer that you could probably give for some of the reasons you do things you do. Why? Because the Word has power.

We get the power of words right? No one really believes that “words shall never hurt me”, do we? Even compared to the sticks and stones – you’ve felt it, haven’t you, when words have done more damage than any physical strike could have? Or maybe you’ve felt when they’ve done more good than any physical thing could have.

But then again, maybe you’ve also received words that weren’t that powerful – when an insult didn’t really sting all that much or a promise didn’t really help. Think about when that happens – it depends on the source, doesn’t it? The insult of someone who doesn’t know what they are talking about, or whose opinion you don’t respect, doesn’t do much. The promise of someone you don’t trust doesn’t either. Right? You’ve got to consider the source.

Compare these. In one month and 10 days – Matt and Alana will be promising love and faithfulness to one another in their wedding vows. This Friday my sister is doing the same. And those words have power because they know the person speaking that promise. They know they can trust those words. In fact, they are so excited about hearing those words from each other that they are spending thousands of dollars to invite all their friends and family to celebrate those vows.

On the flip side, not too long ago, I was downtown and a man asked me for food. He gave me a whole story about just getting out of jail that didn't jibe with how the correctional system works, but I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. So I bought him dinner and talked with him for a while. Then, I gave him what little cash I had in my pocket and he promised me he needed simple toiletry items to get cleaned up for his job interview the next day...but then, when I dropped him off at the drug store, – and he thought I was gone, he went to the liquor store next door and was handed a bottle by a friend in front of it. Then, he showed up an hour late for the downtown Bible Study I had invited him to, letting me know where an ATM was so I could give him more money, and he told me the story of why he needed it with breath that reeked of alcohol...can you blame me for not putting much weight in his words?

Words have power only when you consider the source. So let's do that for the words of our text Vicar read as the first lesson. Consider the source. In the words leading up to our text, God wants to remind us who he is. So God said this, **“As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** And then our text.

This is God talking. This is His Word. Consider that source. He reminds us – I'm the one who reached my hand farther than any telescope can see and put every star, every planet, every galaxy in its place. I'm the one who carved the Grand Canyon and molded Mount Everest. I'm the one who grew every pine, every palm, every blade of Bermuda on every golf course green. I'm the one who gave a pile of dirt six billion lines of DNA. Remember that? And remember how? I said, “Let there be.” And it was.

The same LORD who spoke the words that brought life into existence now says **“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, <sup>11</sup> 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.”**

Just as surely as water works to nourish life, to produce food from the ground – God's Word works. But here's the thing, just as surely as God's Word has power – Satan wants us not to see that power or use that power.

Think about it. How often haven't you treated this source – not as more precious to you than your spouse on your wedding day, but more like that liar begging for money downtown? God says he's got our provision handled; we worry. God says, “Vengeance is mine,” “I'll take care of it”; but we hold a grudge and speak those words of anger as if God can't or won't handle it. God says to give firstfruits; we make sure our barns are full before giving. God says, “Preach my Word”. You say, “Well, pastor can handle that. I'm not cut out for that,” as if God didn't make you what he has made you. So no one shows up to go canvassing. You bite your tongue instead of speaking up for your faith at work.

God speaks – the same voice, the same breath that made you, and you doubt its power. You may never say you doubt his power to do what he says, but we certainly live like that’s the case, like we have to prioritize everything else because of all the things WE need to take care of as if God couldn’t handle it.

But God just wants us to use his Word because his word has power. After all, it is his. **Consider the Source.**

And **Consider the Substance.** Think about *what* he says. In our text he says his Word accomplishes his desires (and you know that his desire is that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth) and achieves his purposes. And what is the purpose of his Word? What is this Word all about? John gives the answer in his first letter - **1 John 5:12-13** <sup>12</sup> **He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.** <sup>13</sup> **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.**

What is the substance? Eternal life. Everything in here – from the account of Adam and Eve to John’s Revelation – from the history of Israel to the letters to the churches. Every last syllable of this Word is written that you may know that you have eternal life. This is here to give you confidence, which is important because our enemies want anything but that. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh repeat their lies again and again hoping that you’ll forget the source and listen to them. But God’s Word keeps going out – and it comes back bearing fruit.

When you can’t put out of your mind the hurtful words you spoke in anger, the LORD says that he has long ago put them out of his. When you look at yourself and see the filth and failure, the LORD tells you that he sees you as a beautiful bride, free from spot and blame. When your guilt follows close by your side wherever you go, the LORD has put it in black and white that he has removed that sin as far as the east is from the west.

When you realize the debt your failures owe – you open up His Word and hear him declare it paid. **“It is finished.” “The blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin.”** Sins paid for. That’s what God’s Word says. So when you consider the source and you come here with all your baggage, you hear God’s voice – “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And the baggage is gone.

And then you step forward and your Savior says, **“Take and eat... Take and drink. This is my blood of the new covenant, given to you for the forgiveness of sins.”** And as powerfully as God’s Word brought light into being, he brings light and love and hope and confidence into your heart.

**What good are words?** When they are God’s, when you realize the source and hear the substance – they do not return to him empty but accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sent it.

So we get to see 200 children praising his name and living their faith; we get to see 2 college kids here knocking on doors and living their faith as they share it, now going back to school to continue preparing for a life of service – and we get to see the people God connects to him through their service and ours. **What good are Words?** When we take God’s Word on our lips – he accomplishes his purpose. So let’s do it. Let’s take God’s powerful Word from here today and live it out there and share it. Let’s consider its source and consider its substance, and then...the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.