

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/16/92
Isaiah 55:8-11 "What Happens When We Study the Bible?"

Intro: If we are going to learn to be good Bible students, we must learn how to study the Bible. The most critical step is the first--We must learn to Observe.

Illust: Story of methods Scientist and teacher Agassiz

The 3 steps in Bible study are Observation, Interpretation, and Application. We'll be turning to Philippians later to engage in these activities, and actually walk through the steps involved in personal Bible study.

But first, a question...

Q: What happens when we study the Bible?

That's a vital question. Why should I spend important, vital, precious time from my busy schedule studying the Bible? I already read Christian books. I listen to Christian radio programs. I come to church and serve in ministries. Is it really all that necessary for me to get serious about Bible study? Again I must ask...

Q: What happens when we study the Bible?

Proposition: God Himself tells us 3 things about His Word in Isaiah 55:8-11.

- I. The Greatness of God's Word (8-9)
- II. The Goodness of God's Word (10)
- III. The Guarantee of God's Word (11)

Setting:

Isaiah is a tremendous book. It's a literary masterpiece. But it's more than that. It's a rich theological book. It's a book about God. It's a book about God's Plan for His people. You need to know a few key items about the setting and context of this book before you can fully appreciate its message.

--It's author was Isaiah, an 8th century prophet to Judah.

--The 8th century BC was a critical time in Israel's history. There was a political vacuum at first, which allowed Judah to prosper under Uzziah. Then Uzziah died. And the Assyrians moved in. Israel committed spiritual adultery with a passion. God judged the northern 10 tribes by allowing Assyria to conquer and deport her in 722 BC. Did Judah learn a lesson from her sister to the north? Not really. The southern kingdom turned from God as well. Isaiah ministered as a prophet to the southern kingdom. He served for over 50 years under 4 kings.

--The prophet Isaiah acted as God's prosecuting attorney. His task was to announce to God's people that they had passed the point of no return. His book revealed 2 main truths:

1. Judgment was coming due to sin (1-39).

1:1-4 "Isaiah...the Lord has spoken; I have nourished children...they have rebelled."
39:5-6 "Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the Word... Babylon..."

2. There was hope for God's people (40-66).

40:1 "Comfort ye my people."

66:22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth...remain...so shall your see remain."

Q: How could there be lasting hope for a sinful people? What if God did restore His people? Wouldn't they reject Him again? How could they overcome their sin problem?

A: Isaiah 53--God would send THE SUFFERING SERVANT.
53:10-11 "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him...my righteous servant shall justify..."

With that announcement of hope ringing in their ears, the disobedient people of God heard an amazing offer. I want you to see it in Is 55.

55:1-3 "Come...come...come...come..."

And what did God promise would happen if they did?

55:3b "...come unto me, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you..." Then God talked in specifics about His offer and Israel's problem.

55:6-7 "Seek ye the Lord...Let the wicked forsake his way...and He will pardon."

Remember our question, "What happens when we study the Bible?"

Now we're to see the answer. In the next 4 verses God tells us 3 things about His Word...

I. The Greatness of God's Word (8-9)

V 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts..."

We are finite. God is infinite. We are limited by space and time. God is not. We are the creature. God is the Creator.

Problem with New Age: Erases this distinction, with its pantheistic belief. New Age teaching says we are all gods. We all have infinite potential locked up within us.

But the Bible teaches otherwise. We are created by God. He alone is truly great. He alone is all-knowing. He alone is worthy of majesty and honor. He alone is totally unique. In fact His Word is totally great and unique. His Word is on a different wavelength.

V 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth...so my ways...my thoughts..."

Illust: It's impossible to tune in WCDR on an AM transistor

Why? It's on a different wavelength. FM.

So it is with God's thoughts. They are on a different wavelength from ours. We can't reach God's thoughts by looking deep within ourselves. In fact, as David Hubbard puts it in his book "Does the Bible Really Work?", "We can no more successfully grapple with his (God's) thoughts than a 5-year old child can understand Einstein's theory of relativity." (53)

But we have an even greater problem. As Hubbard again states, "If our creatureliness makes it hard for us to find God, our sinfulness makes it hard for us to face God. The thoughts and ways of God not only baffle us; they condemn us." (53)

Listen. We would be totally in the dark if not for this. God has revealed His thoughts to us. Where? In His Word.

May we never forget the greatness of His Word...

Illust:

II. The Goodness of God's Word (10)

God illustrates His goodness with an illustration. It's an illustration full of meaning for people familiar with agriculture. If you have a garden, you'll relate. It's a metaphor relating the food producing process to the Goodness of God's Word.

V 10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow, and returns not..."

There is great order to the food producing process. We can see it day after day after day. By His goodness, God waters the soil with rain and snow. That water is instrumental in a miraculous process. It comes into contact with a seed. That seed germinates and breaks through the earth. More water enables that plant to grow, and eventually produce a harvest. We enjoy the food harvest because of the goodness of God.

Listen. So we taste the goodness of God in His Word.

Mk 4:3 "Hearken, Behold there went out a sower to sow..."

Mk 4:14 "The sower soweth the Word."

What happens when we study the Bible? We are tasting the very goodness of God! We are feasting on that which can produce growth and fruit in our lives!

Illust:

Tran: The Greatness, the Goodness of the Word, and...

III. The Guarantee of God's Word (11)

V 11 "So shall my word be...it shall not return unto me void..."

See the connection. "So" shall my word be, God says. Just like the illustration in v 10.

Q: What's true of God's Word?

A: 3 guarantees...

1. God's Word won't return void to Him.
2. God's Word will accomplish what He pleases.
3. God's Word will prosper.

Listen. When God speaks, astounding things happen. Remember what happened when God spoke in Gen 1:1? The entire universe sprang into existence! Think of that! Ps 33:6, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth."

Remember what happened when the God-man spoke to Lazarus after he had been dead 4 days? John 11:43, "Lazarus, come forth." Jn 11:44 "And he that was dead came forth..."!!

Remember what the Lord told John about how he would revamp this universe at the final day? Rev 21:5, "And He that sat on the throne SAID, Behold I make all things news. And He SAID unto me, Write; for these WORDS are true and faithful." And the next verse--Rev 21:6, "And he SAID unto me, It is done...!"

O the power in the Word of God!

Look again at God's guarantee. "My Word shall not return void..." Remember the immediate context. God is talking to Israel. She is heading to captivity in Babylon. That's certain. But what else is certain? In Isaiah 44:28 and 46:10-11, God told His people He wouldn't abandon them. He revealed He was going to raise up a man named Cyrus to restore the exiles back to the Promised Land.

That was God's promise. The judgment was certain. So was the promise of deliverance. God says, "You can count on Me. You can trust My Word. My Word is sure, reliable, true."

Notice some characteristics of God's Word as revealed in Isaiah:

1. Enduring (40:8)
2. Life-giving (40:8 quoted in I Pt 1:23)
3. Convicting (1:10)
4. Revealing (of the future 2:1)
5. Can harden people (6:9-10)
6. Can be despised and rejected by people (5:24; *8:20; 30:12)
7. Precise (28:13-14)
8. Good (39:8)
9. Demands a response (45:23)
10. Causes men to tremble (66:5)

Think of the Guarantee of God's Word. God's Word never returns to God void or empty, but it accomplishes His purpose every time it goes out. Sometimes it breaks the hard soil and produces fruit, when we submit to it. Sometimes it packs down the soil even harder, when we resist it.

Illust:

God's promise to Israel in Isaiah's day was this, "Come! And you will live!"

I want you to taste a NT guarantee. Rom 8:32 "Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things." There's the promise--The God who gave us His Son guarantees He will give us everything else we need for life and godliness. You can count on it. Why? That's the guarantee of His Word.

Q: What happens when we study the Bible?

A: We avail ourselves to words that are Great, Good, and Guaranteed.

Why would you want to miss out on that?!

Illust:

The Steps Involved in Bible Study:

Review: (from 2 weeks ago)

Key: Effective Bible study requires a method.

Q: What steps should we follow when we study the Bible?

A: Howard Hendricks, in his book "Living By the Book", suggests 3.

Transp: "Observation, Interpretation, Application" cartoon

Ask these key questions:

1. Observation--What do I see?
2. Interpretation--What does it mean?
3. Application--How does it work? How does it apply to my life?

Q: What kind of things should I look for as I study the Bible?

A: Look for specific things. We've been using Philippians as an example.

Discuss: (write down)

1. Author and Occasion of the Book?
2. What topics are addressed in Philippians?
3. What do you think is the MAIN topic in the book?
4. What literary form is Philippians?

Working Outline of Philippians:

Theme of the Book: Jesus Christ

Chapter 1	Commitment to Christ	1:21
Chapter 2	Service to Christ	2:5
Chapter 3	Confidence in Christ	3:3
Chapter 4	Living in Christ	4:13
	--Our Thinking	
	--Our Perspective	
	--Our Provision	

Key: When it comes to Bible study, observing the facts/data is the first step. The next step is to correctly interpret the facts. That was our assignment in Philippians this week.

Interpretation is not easy. Remember what Phillip asked the eunich?

Acts 8:30 "Do you understand what you're reading?"

Remember what Peter said of Paul?

II Pt 3:15-16 "...even as Paul has written...some things hard to be understood..."

Key: Interpretation asks, "What does it mean?"

To find out what a verse means, do 3 things:

1. Compare--Compare Scripture with Scripture.
 - a. Don't go to the commentary first.
 - b. Use the Concordance!
2. Context--Check out the Context.

Illust: Old spiritual (Hendricks, 225), "The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone...to the hip bone...to the tail bone, Now hear the word of the Lord." Hendricks says, "That's primitive physiology but good methodology. It

recognizes the connectedness of the body, that it all hangs together. There's unity. So it is with Scripture." (225)

3. Commentaries--Check secondary sources.

a. Study Bible footnotes

b. Bible Dictionaries

Illust: Culture differences... Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper"--a 15th century interpretation of the event.

c. Expository Commentaries

Examples in Philippians:

1:6 "Being confident of this that He who began...will perform it..."

What does that mean? How does that compare with...

2:12 "...work out your salvation..."

Can a person lose salvation?

1:12 "...furtherance of the gospel?"

How did Paul's imprisonment advance the gospel ministry? See vv 13, 14

2:5 "let this mind be in you"

What does that mean? Check context of 2:1-4

2:6-8 "...thought it not robbery to be equal with God..."

Did Jesus stop being God? Did He, as in Charles Wesley's song, "empty Himself of all but love"?

3:2 "Beware of dogs."

What does Paul have in mind? See 3:3 "circumcision"

3:15 "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect..."

Can Christians be perfect? Check concordance for meaning of word "perfect."

4:19 "But my God shall supply all your NEED..."

Is there a difference between our "needs" and "wants." See 4:12

Key: Interpretation asks, What does it mean? Do 3 things--Compare, Context, Commentaries.

Next Week: Application, How does it work? How does it apply to my life?