

Advent Mid-Week, 2017

Scripture Alone

Isaiah 55:6-11

The Bible is the People's Book

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Could you put that in writing? The salesman has assured us the company will stand behind the product if there is any problem. We need more than just his word on that. We tell the loan officer at the bank, sure we'll pay the loan off. She needs something more concrete than our word for it. We might say the written word on paper guarantees the spoken word.

The Holy Spirit moved the writers of the Bible to put God's Word on paper. The Spirit did not have them write it all down as if what God said needed additional guarantee. God would use the written Word to reveal what he said to all people especially his gracious Promise of forgiveness and life in the Savior. God would put it in writing that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen again, is the

Christ. This was written for all generations until the end.

God's spoken word to his people was true and reliable. God wanted his words recorded, as St. John wrote in chapter 20 of his gospel, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Unlike so many in the Old Testament and those who were with Jesus, we have not heard God's Word directly from his mouth. We have the sacred record, as did they. That sacred record, the Holy Scripture, is one of the three "solas" of Martin Luther. Luther wanted that sacred record in the hands of the people.

This is what the prophet Isaiah was writing about. God had a message for the people. **The Bible is the People's Book.** God's Word is the written record of God's thoughts and ways. God's Word will accomplish God's desire and achieve his purpose.

God moved the prophet Isaiah to write. Verses six and seven are God's call through the prophet to the true repentance befitting our Advent season. "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

Those wicked ways and evil thoughts are ours. We own them and they condemn us to hell. Those evil thoughts are not limited to our gross thoughts of wickedness and evil like fornication, theft, anger. They include any idea that my prayers and my love and my works are good things that prepare me for righteousness that avails before God. Isaiah makes no such distinction.

God's thoughts and ways are contrary to ours. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD." While we are thinking we do something to save ourselves, God is thinking, no, you do not contribute one iota to your salvation. While we act as if the way to God is through our own righteousness, God acts on the righteousness of Christ under the law.

No thoughts and actions could be further apart. They can never be comingled. The edge of the heavens is beyond light years distance from the earth. "so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Our thoughts and ways about salvation center on self. God’s thoughts and ways to save us center on Jesus Christ.

We know this because God saw to it that his Word revealed these things in the Scripture, the written Word. None of this was Isaiah’s idea. No prophet ever interpreted the prophecy of Scripture but spoke only as the Holy Spirit moved them along. God wanted us to know that our righteousness is useless. In the Scripture God calls us to repentance, Forsake that evil. Turn from it. Instead, turn to the LORD and find his mercy and pardon.

This is why Luther had Scripture as one of the three solas. This is why he translated the Bible into the people’s German. The Bible is the people’s book. He wanted the Bible in their hands. Luther wanted the Word of God in the people’s hearts. He wanted them to find grace alone and faith alone in its pages. In their hearts the Word would accomplish God’s desire and achieve his purpose.

Church historian, Philip Schaff wrote, “The richest fruit of Luther's leisure in the Wartburg, and the most important and useful work of his whole life, is the translation of the New Testament, by which he brought the teaching and example of Christ and the Apostles to the mind and heart of the Germans in life-like reproduction. It was a republication of the gospel. He made the Bible the people's book in church, school, and house.”

The Word of God did accomplish God’s desire. That desire is the sinner turn away from any thoughts of salvation by works. As more and more people read their book now in their language and hands, they came to see Jesus Christ as their Savior. They came to see the lies of penance and purgatory, indulgences and relics.

Through the Scripture, the Holy Spirit changes our thoughts to God’s thoughts and our ways to God’s ways. The moisture God sends down from heaven does not go back up without having done its work. It waters the earth, “making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater.” The gospel does its work. “So does my word that comes out of my mouth.”

The Word of God may not always accomplish what we want as we take it out into the world. It does always accomplish what God wants. God’s Word achieves the purpose for which he sent it, to water and grow the church. How do we meet those who mock and ask, “Do you really think that everything depends on the Word?” Luther gives us our response in his commentary on Isaiah, “God consoles us that although our word is persecuted and resisted, it will nevertheless achieve results, because it is the word of the mouth of God.”

We would indeed be foolish to demand that God put his Word into writing as a guarantee. Besides, there is no need. The Holy Spirit already has given us Scripture Alone. Amen. <SDG>