**Scripture Alone**

Isaiah 55:1-13

Martin Luther often pointed out how **it’s impossible to have two authorities** - one must always win. If ***Mom and Dad*** disagree, one must have a higher authority. If two men both claim to be ***the rightful King***, only one can actually BE KING - their claims must be investigated and one king acknowledged as the rightful authority.

Luther’s concern with authority often put him head to head with the Pope. The Catholic Church claimed two authorities - **Scripture AND Tradition**. But Luther said, “You can’t have two authorities because over and over those two disagree. Whichever you actually follow is your true authority.” And, of course, the Catholic Church consistently chose church tradition over Scripture whenever the two appeared to disagree.

And so the first of the Five Solas proved to be the fountainhead of the Reformation - **Scripture Alone must be our authority**. There can be no rival source of knowledge, no higher court of appeal. God’s Word must be first and foremost, it must be sufficient and supreme. If you have another authority that you turn to for truth and direction - such as your own feelings and desires - then your life and eternity have shifted off of the only place Jesus told us was a firm foundation.

That’s what we saw two weeks ago! The wise man who built his house on a rock is the one who **hears the words of Jesus** and DOES THEM. Without the words of Jesus, there is no firm foundation. Hearing your own words and doing them gives you no security. Serving your own desires and following your own dreams is how to build a life on sand - that life will quickly collapse.

And as we saw last week, the reason for this is **because the Bible is God’s Word** - it is INSPIRED - breathed out by God. It is INERRANT - completely trustworthy. And it is SUFFICIENT - God has given us everything we need in the pages of this book. ***“So that the man of God may be COMPLETE, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”***

Scripture Alone. That is our foundation. That is our security, our source of truth and knowledge and direction. And because God has spoken so clearly and consistently, the Bible gives us a firm and unshakeable foundation on which to build our lives and to rest our eternity.

Today in Isaiah 55 we will see Three Blessings only the Bible can give us - three gifts found in Scripture alone. First:

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Save** you

“Come to me; hear, that your soul may live.” Isaiah 55:3

Isaiah 55 is **an invitation** to come to the Lord and live. Verse 1 opens “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” Without water and food, your body will die. But how can a SOUL live? What is the water that your spirit needs to survive? The answer is right there in verse 3 - “HEAR.”

* If your ***house is on fire,*** you need to hear the alarms going off or you will die in your bed.
* If you have ***cancer***, you need to hear the truth of your diagnosis or you will die as that deadly disease spreads throughout your body.
* If there is a ***live shooter*** in your office you need to hear that this danger exists so you can run or hide.
* Or to spin it toward good news - if your ***rich uncle dies*** and leaves you a million dollars, you need to hear of his death and receive news of your inheritance, so you can go get it!
* If you play for the Bucs and the team is going to the ***Super Bowl*** again, you need to hear when and where the game is so you can be there to play.

Everything in life depends on **ACCURATE INFORMATION**. And the same is true of spiritual things. If you don’t hear and know the truth, you cannot be saved. “Come to me,” God says here in Isaiah 55 as in so many other places in the Bible. “Come to me, HEAR, that your soul may live.” Listen to the next line.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Save** you

“Hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant.” Isaiah 55:3

This is God speaking through **Isaiah the prophet** in 700 BC - around 300 years after King David. Remember, David wanted to build a temple - a house for the Lord. But God said, ***“You will not build a house for me, but I will build a house for you, David - a kingdom dynasty that will last FOREVER.”*** Here, God speaks through Isaiah to re-state that promise to all of Israel - all faithful Jews who will listen to this invitation and COME. All who have “ears to hear.”

Sadly, the story of Israel - in spite of the fact that Jesus whole ministry was devoted to preaching the gospel of the kingdom to them - was that ***most Jews did NOT have ears to hear.*** Most chose to harden their hearts and reject His Word. And so, most missed out on this promise to David of an everlasting covenant. Because that covenant could not be entered with the blood of sheep and goats - but only with the blood of Jesus.

***Remember the Passover?*** How were families saved on that dark night in Egypt? They had to ***HEAR about the means of salvation*** - a one year old lamb, slaughtered at twilight, and its blood applied to the doorposts of the home. No one would have figured that out intuitively. You had to HEAR and OBEY. The same is true of Jesus and the salvation He offers in the blood of His new covenant - people have to HEAR so they can apply the blood of His sacrifice to the doorposts of their hearts. Listen to verse 7!

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Save** you

“Return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:7

The first necessary step toward salvation is HEARING God’s Word. “Faith comes by HEARING and hearing by the word of Christ.” People cannot believe in a message they never hear. As Carl F.H. Henry said, ***“The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.”***

When the first plane hit the **World Trade Center**, no one knew another plane was coming. No one knew what was going on. They thought that first impact was a light airplane - just an accident. But as word spread that it was a coordinated terrorist attack, they sent in police and fire first responders to evacuate both towers completely. The lives of every person in those towers depended on getting that accurate information QUICKLY. This is not some random fire drill. This is life or death.

That is the reality for **our mission in this world**. People are trapped in a building that is about to collapse. Their only hope to be saved is to hear the Word of God - the message that salvation is possible in Christ! The Savior has come, but you have to escape your old, sinful life and come to Him in faith to be saved.

* People liking you because ***you are nice*** will not save them. Only God’s Word can save them.
* People respecting you for ***your good work ethic*** will not save them. Only God’s Word can save them.
* ***Buddhists and Muslims and Hindus*** serving their false gods cannot save them - only God’s Word - only the GOSPEL of Jesus Christ, can save them!
* ***And the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.***

That is the first exclusive blessing of the Bible. Scripture alone has the message by which people can be saved. But they have to HEAR this message, and they have to hear it in time. Second.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” Isaiah 55:1

The first two verses of Isaiah 55 are **an urgent and compelling invitation** to come to God. Jesus referenced this prophecy in his teaching ministry as He promised springs of living water that would flow from within his followers. And the Bible ends with Jesus again quoting this exact invitation in Revelation 22.

The world offers a whole buffet of alternatives that SAY they will satisfy your longings - literal food and drink, love, relationships, sex, money, power, success, possessions, vacations, experiences. Every commercial, every advertising campaign, every TV show, every sporting event, every movie, every product - is really selling happiness.

Remember the old beer commercial with guys around a campfire saying, ***“It just doesn’t get any better than this.”*** A campfire? Some pretty girls. A Miller Lite. I don’t know much about beer, but I’m pretty sure there are lots of beers that are quite a bit better than that. And camping? Come on! Almost any way to spend your time is better than sitting outside with the mosquitos in the rain, with bathroom facilities ranging from disgusting to terrifying. “It just doesn’t get any better than this.” That is either extreme exaggeration or depressing despair. “I’m sorry guys, it just doesn’t get any better than this.”

And that despairing conclusion is the reality apart from Jesus. The best this world has to offer is temporary relief, brief glimpses of happiness. Nothing really satisfies. Everything leaves you needing another fix, a little bit more. I just read a book about Mussolini - ***the only people more stressed and depressed than dictators are celebrities***. Mussolini was a tremendously unhappy man. He went from one mistress to another throughout his life - usually having two or three at a time. He grew in power and influence through the 1920s and 30s but there was always another problem, another threat, another meeting, another fear. And once the war turned against the Axis powers, he ended his life huddled in a van with other fascists, trying to escape to Switzerland but being captured and shot with his latest mistress.

 Listen to the warning in this passage.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” Isaiah 55:2

***God alone has the food and water that can satisfy our souls*** - why do we settle for the sweet tarts of this world when God offers us Prime Rib? Why do we try to harvest from the dumpster of sin and idolatry when God offers us fresh bread and crystal clear living water?

Remember what Jesus said: ***“Man shall not live by bread alone but by EVERY WORD that comes from the mouth of God.”*** Jesus said that in Matthew 4, during his temptation. But he was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, the heart of the Jewish Law. There, Moses compared God’s Word to the Manna God left for them to literally feed them. Just as the people of Israel depended on daily bread from the Lord for their physical lives, so we depend on daily bread from the Lord for our spiritual lives.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you

“Listen diligently to me, and eat was is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” Isaiah 55:2

I hope you have experienced this frequently in your times with the Lord. You wake up and go straight to the coffee maker. With that cup of hot coffee in one hand you open the Bible. And as you wake up physically for the day, you begin to read Scripture you feel the Lord waking you up spiritually as well. You drink in the coffee even as you drink in words from Jesus directly to your soul. **Every single day the Lord provides MEALS for us in His Word** - if we will just stop to EAT THEM.

Sometimes we are so rushed that ***we settle for spiritual Pop Tarts***. I know there are two divergent views on Pop Tarts. Personally, I think they are high end cuisine and if I get two strawberry frosted pop tarts on my way in to work I do not feel shortchanged, I feel supremely blessed. Those of you who know some things about nutrition know that is no healthier than the peanut butter captain crunch that is my second choice for a great start to the day. But most of the time I settle for the two eggs on toast - and not the good foamy white bread either, the nasty root and twig whole grain bread. I’ve gotten off track.

***The point is that we often SNACK on Scripture instead of FEASTING on it.*** God has an endless BUFFET prepared for us in His Word. Every morning or evening we can come to this all you can eat buffet and commune with God Himself as we read the Bible and pray. It really is as simple as that. We teach our kids this beautiful simplicity - God speaks to us through His Word; we speak to God in prayer. Sometimes it’s just a routine conversation like planning your next trip to the grocery store with your wife. But other times there is a special connection - a touching moment when the Lord really opens the pages of Scripture for you and you know, that verse, that passage, was just for me today.

I truly hope that is more the usual for you and not the rare exception. As we start this new year I encourage everyone to find a Bible reading plan and stick to it. Set up a regular time every day that you meet with the Lord and keep those appointments. Think of them as your spiritual MEALS. **Hear the Lord inviting you** - calling you - “Come, all who are thirsty - come to the waters! Come, buy wine and milk!”

**Only God’s Word** can satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. So eat well this year. Have spiritual Pop Tarts from time to time. But make it your regular practice to set aside a full 20-30 minutes of uninterrupted time to read the Bible and pray. I find it very helpful to ***have a journal*** with me for this - to write down in my own hand the verse or two that most connects with me each day - often writing it down as a prayer back to the Lord. Listen to the rationale in verse 9 and the promise in verse 10.

2. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:9

2. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout… so shall my word be…” Isaiah 55:10

God’s Word is like water. It is like food. **It is like RAIN** that the thirsty ground drinks in and from that rain come up all the flowers and fruits and vegetables and trees - everything we depend on for life comes from the nourishment provided by RAIN.

2. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you

“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.” Isaiah 55:11

This is the key verse for the INFALLIBILITY of God’s Word. It will not return to God EMPTY. Just as rain falls, nourishes the ground and only goes back into the sky after accomplishing its purpose, so the Word of God falls on our ears and it does not return to God until it accomplishes His purpose. First it saves us. Then it satisfies us. One more blessing that comes exclusively from God’s Word.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Sanctify** you

“It shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11

***Why did God send His Word?*** What was the purpose of the prophets? What was the mission of Jesus? To call forth a HOLY PEOPLE - a people set apart for the Lord alone. In the middle of the sermon on the mount Jesus quotes Leviticus saying, ***“Therefore you must be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*** The demand of the Law of Moses is HOLINESS - perfection - unstained obedience. Jesus did not deny that or cancel it, **He actually INTENSIFIED the Law of Moses**, applying it not just to lifestyle but also to the heart. Listen to how Jesus prayed for his followers in John 17.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Sanctify** you

“Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth.” John 17:17

Jesus knew he was leaving his followers in a dark, broken, sinful world. So he prayed for us. He prayed that we would remain holy - unstained by idolatry and evil. And ***the means God has given us to be sanctified is HIS WORD.***

This is the purpose for which God sent His word - the purpose that it cannot fail to accomplish. Think about this - the only thing that can prevent God’s Word from succeeding is US. The devil can’t stop God’s Word. The world can’t tarnish God’s Word. ***The only part of this equation that can break down is you and me.***

We have to respond to this invitation. We have to COME. We have to LISTEN. We have to BELIEVE and receive the word like the good soil that bears much fruit. Listen to the beautiful results described when we do this. Back in Isaiah 55.

3. Only God’s Word can **Sanctify** you

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing.” Isaiah 55:12

This is the transforming power of God’s Word - **it can give us JOY** in a dark and despairing world that sits around a campfire with beer and says, “It just doesn’t get any better than this.” We know it gets SO MUCH better than that! We have the source of all joy! We have the fountain of life! We connect with God through His Word and as we commune with Him, He fills us with joy and singing! Verse 13.

3. Only God’s Word can **Sanctify** you

“Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord.” Isaiah 55:13

**God’s Word has TRANSFORMING POWER**. Jeremiah said, ***“Is not God’s Word like a FIRE and like a HAMMER?”*** It breaks through our sin and stubbornness and changes us. It confronts our idolatry and rebellion and calls us to wholehearted worship. It challenges our worldliness and calls us to set our hearts and minds on things above.

Do you need help to change? **If God would do ONE MIRACLE** in your life this year, what would it be?

* Healing for your marriage where there is conflict?
* Spiritual vibrancy and passion where there is dryness and complacency?
* A renewal of purpose and fulfillment where you are now drifting?
* Increased focus and single-mindedness instead of distraction and time wasting?
* Increased effectiveness in evangelism instead of frustration?

Don’t miss the second half of verse 13. “It shall make a name for the Lord.” The miracles God accomplishes through His Word are **for HIS GLORY** - for HIS NAME. When we ask with wrong motives our prayers will not be answered. But when we ask for more of Jesus and more glory for Him, those prayers He loves to answer.

Here are the three blessings we can only find in Scripture.

**Three Exclusive Blessings of the Bible:**

1. Only God’s Word can **Save** you
2. Only God’s Word can **Satisfy** you
3. Only God’s Word can **Sanctify** you

This is why we build everything at Oakwood on the firm foundation of Scripture - and Scripture ALONE. **The Bible is our sole authority**, our single source of truth, our ultimate basis for our understanding of God, ourselves and our purpose in life. We stand firmly and joyfully in the Reformation legacy that says first and foremost - Sola Scriptura.

Because ***only God’s Word has the power to save.*** At the center of Biblical revelation in the Bible is the GOSPEL. That is the message that has the power to transform a sinner into a saint. But people must first HEAR so they can believe. Only God’s Word can satisfy. As you set goals and work on your goals for 2022 - put your relationship with God first, and prioritize FEEDING on God’s Word, even as you plan your meals for the week, plan your spiritual meals as well! And the promise here in Isaiah 55 is that God will use His Word to accomplish His purposes in you and through you.

***Come, if you’re thirsty today*** - come to the Word of God and drink deeply!

***Come, if you’re hungry today*** - come to the Word of God and feast on the food your soul most desperately needs.

***Come, if you’re hurting and hopeless, tired and fearful*** - whatever you need, God will give it to you THROUGH HIS WORD.

 Story from Piper’s *Contending for our All* - Athanasius, Owen or Machen…?