

Sexagesima
Texts: Isaiah 55:10-13; Heb 4:9-13; Luke 8:4-15
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Prosperous Word

Does God's Word *always* prosper? One look at the world we live in, and it's easy to say "no." It only makes sense, right? I don't know how you could say otherwise. When we think of prospering and prosperity, we typically think in terms of abundance. If something prospers, that means that it *flourishes and spreads and grows* and becomes *very strong and vibrant*. I hear this word, and the first images that come to mind are like those we hear in the Gospel lesson today when the seed falls in the good soil. That seed prospers. It grows. It blooms. It produces a harvest yield one-hundred times over. And all of this talk of prosperity is always considered under the umbrella of *goodness and positivity*. We don't speak of weeds or rocks or evil as prospering, even though they might abound. We don't speak of crime or cancer in terms of prosperity, even though they too can spread and grow and become very strong...even flourish. Those sorts of terrible things are the very opposite of prosperity. To prosper is good. It's very good.

Some of you might be squirming a bit in your seats right now because only televangelists and other frauds of the faith speak of *prosperity* in their sermons. You know what I'm talking about. Some guy with a fancy suit and a private jet fills an arena full of people and starts promising you that if you just give your life over to God and have more faith, God will prosper you. If you buy their book and send them money, they will teach you the secret to living your best life now and attaining all the goodness and health and wealth and prosperity that God wants you to have. If you believe, you can achieve! Name it and claim it! Prosperity awaits!

Now, before any of you make a bee-line for the door, understand that this is not the prosperity I'm referring to when I ask if God's Word *always* prospers. Although...the very fact that we *already* agreed that the current conditions and practices and beliefs of this fallen and sinful cesspool of a world prove that God's Word *doesn't always prosper* does reveal the ugly truth that we are thinking of prosperity in the same exact way that Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer and all these other spiritual pimps do. Just like them, we're looking at results. We're looking for results. More specifically, just like them, we're looking for *good and favorable results; positive, uplifting, growing, abounding, flourishing results*. But...because we don't see these results, we say, "Nope. God's Word and will *doesn't prosper*. *Not always*. *In fact, very rarely*."

Well...that's not what God says (at least, not in the Latin translation of His promise to Isaiah). It's true. In verse 11 God very clearly says, "My Word will not return to Me void/empty, but it will accomplish what I purpose it to do. It will *prosperabitur* what I purpose and will. It will prosper." So...here we have God very clearly saying that His Word will and does prosper. It accomplishes *exactly*

what He sends it to do, and it *never* returns to Him void or empty. God never takes a stab at something and comes up short. God never has a “swing and a miss.” He **always** prospers.

I don't know about you, but that's tough to believe. I know God is always working for the good of those who love Him, and I know that God ultimately accomplishes what He purposes...*but prospers?* What about the parable in our Gospel lesson today? Sure, the good plot of soil prospered, but there were three other plots that didn't prosper. In fact, Jesus Himself says very clearly that the seed of God's Word fell in those three spots, and in all three instances there was **no growth**. The seed was scorched and crushed and devoured by the devil and his demonic means and ways. The seed fell among rocks and had no root. A little trial and tribulation enters into picture, and the plant withers and dries out and blows right over. The seed that fell among thorns and briars and thistles gets choked out. The thorns and weeds that are the *pleasures and cares and concerns of this world* choke out and rob that sprig of life-giving nutrients and water. The poor little plant doesn't stand a chance. It doesn't bear fruit. You know as well as I do that a tomato plant that makes no tomatoes is no good. It may as well be dead. **For all intents and purposes, it is dead.** There is no fruit. That's the reality God speaks of here. Worthless, fruitless, dead reality.

Think about that. Three out of the four plots where God's Word was sown produce negative results. **There is no harvest! Nothing!** And yet God says that His Word *prosper?* Maybe God only meant that with Isaiah. Maybe things were different with the Old Testament. Maybe it's the translation. I mean...nobody speaks Latin anymore. Maybe that's the problem. The word is translated wrong. *Nope, nope, and nope.*

Folks: This divine promise of God's prosperous Word is *eternal and unchanging*, just like Him. What God spoke to Isaiah, He also taught in parable form to His disciples, and He also taught to the Hebrew Christians, and He continues to teach to us today. **His Word works, and it works prosperously!** As I said before, He *never* swings and misses. He *never* whiffs. God's Word *always* prospers. How can He say such a thing? How can I stand here and say the same thing? Easy. Does God work all things for the good of those who love Him? Of course, we all know that the answer to this is “yes.” Does God ever desire that anyone should *remain in or persist in their sin?* Does God ever desire that any person should die in sin? Again, we all know the answers to these questions. God desires the death of **no one**. God desires that **all** hear and turn and repent and live. God desires that no man dies in sin, but that all men turn and hold fast to Him and live; that they turn and hold fast to the free and unmerited gift that is abundant life in Him.

Okay...so what do we need to do? How can we hope to accomplish this and bring this to fruition? First off, you ***DON'T*** accomplish this! This isn't your doing. It is the merciful and gracious working of God. God makes good soil out of lifeless clay. God grants the growth. God gives the life. **Let Him work!** **Preach the Word! Hear the Word! Heed the Word!** That's it. I know you're probably wanting to hear something more glorious and in-depth and labor-intensive. Some of you are all amped up and ready to do all kinds of things to make God's little garden plot here explode with abundant growth. We love to do our part.

Well...by virtue of your baptism into Christ, you are a priest of God. You are called to serve God by serving His people in your daily vocations; in the places and fields and valleys that He calls you to serve. Preach the Word. Sow the seed of His Word. You know the Truth of His Law and His Gospel. Unsheathe the sword that is His Word. This is what God told Isaiah. This is what He told the apostles. This is what He told the Hebrew Christians. This is what He still tells us today. Even in the midst of what seems like total abject failure, God is **still** prospering and working an over-abundance of good. ***If anything, total abject failure gets you grounded in His Word, right? What does God say? What does He say to you? How is God prospering you as you bear your cross?***

And here's the real rub for most people: You may still very well "lose," ***in spite of proclaiming the Truth of God's Word.*** You may very well come up empty, feeling utterly eviscerated and hollowed out after sharing God's Truth and then getting rejected, ignored, and placated. In fact, you **will** bear crosses. You **will** be hated and despised and ignored on account of Christ and your faith in Him. He's already made that clear, multiple times...and yet we always act so surprised when it happens. We've done everything right. We've followed all the rules. And yet...we still fail. No returns. No yield. No prosperity. Maybe it's faulty seed. Maybe there's more we need to do. Maybe we should try something different. ***Nope, nope, and nope.*** Folks: God has **never** promised you man's worldly version of prosperity. Only the devil does that. God has only ever promised you a cross on this side of eternity. ***"Take up your cross and follow Me."***

Isaiah, Jeremiah, St. Paul, any of the apostles...they didn't exactly live the glorious life, did they? In fact, every one of them met with some pretty harsh treatment throughout their ministries. Most, if not all of them, met with ***very violent ends.*** And yet...God's Word prospered them. They remained faithful. They remained rooted in Christ and His promise of Life, mercy, peace, and forgiveness, even as they were being taunted and persecuted and beat down and crushed and pulverized and put to death. Through it all, they remained rooted in the joy and peace of Christ Jesus. They rejoiced; they bore abundant faithful fruits ***even as they suffered,*** because they were rooted in Christ Jesus.

And that, folks, is all I can do today. I can't and I won't stand here today and promise you a rose garden. (I know that song is now going through your head.) I don't promise you worldly prosperity and success and wellness. As I said, ***only the devil does that.*** I point you to Christ. I sow the seed that is Christ. Here is almighty God, calling out to you with His sure and certain promise of ***forgiveness and mercy and peace.*** Here is this same almighty God, who victoriously declared, "*It is finished, once and for all time.*" Here is this same almighty God, reaching down from heaven to nurture you with His well-spring of Life. Here is where God is making good soil that receives His abundance of gifts and takes to heart all that He says and promises—Law and Gospel—the result of which is the production of an ***abundance of good and God-pleasing fruits of repentant thanksgiving.***

Folks: I can't make you bear this fruit. **No one can. Only God.** I can't make you bear these fruits any more than I can make the apple tree make apples or the tomato plant make tomatoes. God does the work. He does this work ***in and through His almighty Word;*** the very Word and Promise that took on flesh and died on that wretched tree for you and for all the sins of all mankind. The water and blood that poured forth from His riven side ***waters you and nurtures you and gives you His abundant life.*** His tree, and His tree alone, produces and bears the abundant fruits of everlasting life.

May this precious seed of God's Gospel Word take root in your heart and spring up to bear abundant fruits of repentance and thanksgiving. May this Word—the Word made flesh and hung on the tree to die; the tree of death that was made into the tree of Life by the blood of Christ Himself—may this Word grant you ***peace and comfort and assurance*** all your remaining days. May you ever and always hunger and thirst for His Life-giving fruits of righteousness, and may you ever and always be grounded firmly, faithfully, and joyously in Christ. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!

In His most holy and Life-giving name...AMEN.