

“God Always Keeps His Word”
Isaiah 40:1–8
Rev. Lynn Downing
January 3, 2016 – Evening sermon

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we read in Your Word where when You left to go back to Your Father in heaven You promised You would be with us always, even to the end of the age. We know that You with us at all times, in all situations but You’re especially with us when we praise You in gathered worship so we thank You for this opportunity now and ask now that You’ll continue to be with us and bless us as we set forth the truth of Your Word, lifting You up and giving some insight as to how we, in You, need to respond to the situations of our lives. We pray that You will speak to our minds and hearts and give us the kind of insight we need so as to know You intimately and to represent You well to all that we meet in the house of the Lord and outside. We ask all this in the name of Christ our Savior, Amen.

We will start by looking at Isaiah 40 and then we’ll go to Genesis and some other places in order to follow the points that will be made in this study. In Isaiah 40 it’s a very famous passage that you actually hear the end of every Sunday morning here at Briarwood in preparation for the preaching of the Word. Isaiah 40:6–8 says [6] *A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. [7] The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. [8] The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

I will give you three points in this study after a little bit of set-up and preparation. They will all be built upon this question: why does it seem, and I’m not a negative kind of person, that negatives are more predictable than positives? There is the person who views the glass as half empty and so this person anticipates negatives but there are also negatives that simply take us by surprise and we wonder why that is. So the question is why are negatives more predictable than positives?

Those who believe in what I’m about to share with you might have the tendency to claim that the answer to that question is found in the “validity” of what has come to be called Murphy’s Law. In Murphy’s Law the primary premise is if anything can go wrong it will and then Murphy’s first corollary on top of that is, left to themselves things tend to go from bad to worse. Talk about the glass half empty. Murphy’s second corollary is it is impossible to make anything full-proof because fools are so ingenious. The quantized revision of Murphy’s Law says is that everything goes wrong all at once. Murphy’s constant says that matter will be damaged in direct proportion to its value. It just piles up. We have this predictable inclination to not only anticipate but to recognize the negative.

Murphy’s general philosophy says smile now because tomorrow will be worse. This is all just sort of entertaining and I think that Murphy’s Law has been developed to make people smile. The one that gives me the most entertainment has to do with the light at the end of the tunnel. Murphy’s Law says that the light at the end of the tunnel is the headlamp of an oncoming train. If there is a possibility of several things going wrong the one that will cause the most damage will be the first one to go wrong. If anything can’t go wrong it will go wrong anyhow. Everything takes longer than you think. You never find a lost article until you replace it. You

get the most of what you need the least. Finally, nature always sides with the hidden flaw. That is belabored negativism, isn't it? It does give a slight bit of passing humor to the reality of this question.

There are a lot of negatives in life. I don't want to accentuate the negatives. I want to accentuate the positives but how will we go about doing that? Here is the first of the three points I will present to you. We need to start by asking ourselves where the negatives come from. What is the origin of the things that overcome us in life? It might be that the answer to that which is actually a Biblical answer, might surprise you. It is because God always keeps His Word. Is God an ogre? No He is not. Does He accent the negative? No, no more than He does the positive. I think we will learn in this study as to why the things that take place in our life that if we had our choice, would decline them, actually come from.

Number one God kept His Word about what would be the result from eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:15–17 says [15] *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

Adam and Eve didn't die physically speaking. They did die spiritually so that leads us to conclude there is more than one kind of death. I want to highlight several and then give an application on the second one. So first and foremost there is spiritual death and that is what happened in the Garden of Eden. We in Adam died spiritually in that we became separated from God, lost the life giving and life sustaining relationship that we had with Him. We lost knowing God and being related to Him. We lost enjoying Him.

What happened in the Garden of Eden? In the Garden we lost God and gained sinfulness within ourselves. What is the way that our sinfulness manifests itself? It manifests itself with a preoccupation with ourselves. That is true to a greater degree than I think we either realize or want to admit. Do this in your own life. Log what you do even in a short period of an hour or a longer period if you want, and see if you can come up with how frequently you have been preoccupied with yourself. We are primarily focused upon ourselves. That's what happened in the Garden of Eden. Spiritual death caused us to put ourselves in the place of the relationship with the Lord that we lost due to disobeying Him.

I Corinthians 2:14 says [14] *The natural person (meaning unconverted) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* This means they are understood by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and without the illuminating work of the Spirit we simply don't understand. So until a person has been called by the Holy Spirit, regenerated by the Holy Spirit which means having the light turned on in that person's life to the point that we not only see ourselves the way we really are, but we begin to see God the way He is and spend the rest of our life knowing more and more about Him so that we know how to respond to Him. But the natural man, the unconverted man, does not understand the things of God.

I think that we believers, don't recognize that clearly enough in our dealings with unsaved people. So we scratch our heads and say 'why are they doing what they do?' They are acting the way they act the same reason an orange is an orange, instead of an apple on an orange tree. So spiritual death took place and we lost God. We lost a relationship with Him and understanding with Him. We lost intimacy with Him and we even lost an appetite for Him. We

have no appetite for God on His terms. We may call out to God asking Him to give us something we need but we lost all commitment to Him on His terms.

The second thing we lost in the Garden is that we gained physical death which was put off for a while. It is interesting to note how long people actually lived in those first days and years of the beginning of the world, after creation, but they did die. The kind of death we normally think about is this second one. We don't think a whole lot about spiritual death, even we who believe in Christ but we do prepare for death. We prepare for death by making a will and a number of ways that I won't go into at this point. I heard an interesting statement from someone who wasn't intimidated by death because he knew Christ as his Savior. He said "I'm not really afraid to die I just don't want to be there when it happens." It was because he didn't want to go through suffering, pain and all that.

In I Corinthians 15 it talks of the reality, power and blessedness of the resurrected Christ. I Corinthians 15:25–26 says [25] *For he (Christ) must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* [26] *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* Don't we wish it was first so that we could get on with eternal life, not having to go through death but we can't do that, why? It is because Christ Himself has promised through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul that death will be around and it will be the last enemy that will be overcome, destroyed.

So if you put these first two together – spiritual death as we've described it and the reality that death will be with us until the very end, being the last thing destroyed, then where do all these negatives come from? They come from something that I refer to as the death process. As long as death remains, we will also have to put up with the process of dying. The dying process is not the last few days, weeks or years but do you know what contributes to our death? It is every time we have a headache, a flat tire or any time we have any kind of negative it just chips away at our well-being and we decline a little bit. I know in the early parts of life that everything seems like it's getting better and stronger but not really because in the long run relationship problems, devastating storms, financial difficulty, job loss we can understand how these would take a toll on our life but also the little things do too, like headaches, splinters, irritations and so forth. All of these things just chip away at vitality and welfare until physical death actually takes over, even though we have come to Christ for we still have irritations in life. This is what I refer to as the death process.

So the biggest part of the death process I think we need to label as spiritual warfare, both local and cosmic. In Genesis 3:15 God is talking to Satan and I will cover parts A and B and will get to C later on. Genesis 3:15 says [15] *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* I think another way to refer to enmity is spiritual warfare. There was a cosmic struggle that continued to take place – the struggle on Satan's part is not really a struggle on God's part. God could snuff Satan out in one breath but He won't do it until He has deliberated His decrees from before the foundations of the world that it is time to put him where he belongs – in hell. So in Genesis 3:15 we see that this will be an ongoing thing because of what we saw earlier in I Corinthians 15 where death will be the last enemy that is put to death. So this enmity will continue. There will be this local and cosmic spiritual struggle/warfare until the very end of the world.

That is what causes such cyclical needs as recognition of sin, and that's why we need to pray pretty regularly Psalm 139:23–24 which says [23] *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!* [24] *And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in*

the way everlasting! Do a spiritual check-up. Ask the Lord to make known to us areas that left to ourselves, we don't want to see. So there is the recognition of the spiritual needs that we have as we grow closer to Him and learn to love Him more intimately and more devotedly and that calls for repentance which can lead to revival but revival comes only on God's terms. Repentance and revival can go hand in hand in that there are times that revival produces repentance. There are other times when repentance results in revival by the timing and orchestration of God Himself and then return. There are places in the Scripture where repentance is referred to as return. Return to the Lord. Then there is rejoicing in Him. So the cyclical need in our personal lives and our churches whether through a revitalization ministry or whatever the ministry might be, there is a cyclical need that comes up over and over again to recognize, repent, pursue revival, return to Him to intimacy and to rejoice in Him.

I want to share with you something about all of this from John Calvin. He says, "Under the name of death is comprehended all of those miseries in which Adam involved himself by his defection; for as soon as he revolted from God, the fountain of Life, he was cast down from his former state, in order that he might perceive the life of man without God to be wretched and lost, and therefore differing nothing from death. The miseries of evil of both soul and body with which man is beset so long as he is on earth are a kind of entrance into death. So what I am talking about here is the death process. Death itself entirely absorbs him for the Scripture everywhere calls those dead who being oppressed by the tyranny of sin and Satan, breathe nothing but their own destruction. On the day in which he touched the fruit Adam was consigned to death and death began to reign in him." The death process began to reign in him. So we have looked at the first thing and that is that God kept His Word and that is why we have the death process and negative things.

Secondly, God kept His Word about His Covenant with His people. Here is where we go to the latter part of Genesis 3:15 which says [15] *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* There is the victory. God kept His Word about that. I have a definition in the Bible that once we get to Genesis 3:15c, the Bible is the written record of the history of the giving, the development, the fulfillment and the application of the covenant of grace established in Genesis 3:15. That is what the Bible is. It's wonderful in that once we recognize that we can see it all through the Scripture. Here is a real quick journey.

In Genesis you have the covenant with Abraham and in that covenant God Himself demonstrated by the way He went between pieces of the animals that He Himself would be the one to bear the burden of restoring people to Himself. Then there is Joseph. To me the telling time in Joseph's life is when his brothers come before him and when they discover who he is, they are scared to death because they think death is what will happen to them. Joseph said "Don't be afraid. What you did you did for evil but God meant it for good." When did Joseph know that? I think there is wording in the text in Genesis 45 and 50 that gives indication of the fact that he possibly didn't know that until his brothers were before him. Why were they before him? They were before him to get food to keep from starving to death. Joseph sees that. There is wording in the text that says Joseph was in this position to save many lives and I think that not only applies to saving those from starving but also keeping forward the covenant of grace by the maintaining of the covenantal line through the feeding of his family.

Then there is the Mosaic Law that God gave to us to help us understand that we couldn't do any of this on our own. In all of the Mosaic Law you have multiple occasions where there are pointings to the One who would keep it perfectly. Then there is Joshua who is put into

a very peculiar position. He was to be the leader of the army of Israel but he wasn't going to conquer Canaan. God was going to conquer Canaan. Why? It was because God said to Abraham that He would give him the land. Joshua was at the head of the army but God was at the head of Joshua and gave them the land. Strange things happened such as the walls falling down around Jericho. This is just another brick in the keeping of the covenant.

Then there is David. There is an incident in David's life that I liken to something that happened in Joseph's life. It was when David was before Goliath. Goliath was spouting off as to who would fight him and here comes this kid to fight him. What would have happened if Goliath had won his taunt and won the day? The Philistines, and we have reason to believe, would have destroyed Israel. When know they actually wouldn't have been able to do that because God was committed to keeping the covenant and doing that would necessitate keeping Israel but God gets Goliath out of the way in such a demonstrative way by having David kill him with a sling and cut off his head. I think that is a descriptive part of the covenant development so that God shows how nothing will prevent the keeping of the covenant, the fulfilling and application of the covenant of grace.

This all finally comes to a head with the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity and the life, work and ministry of Christ. This is what you call Biblical theology that is tracing the covenant through the Old Testament, the New Testament and seeing how Christ is the fulfillment of it all. So the second thing was that God kept His Word about His Covenant with His people. He kept His Word about if they touched the tree and ate the fruit which was death and its entrance into the world. The death process came into the world with all its negatives.

Thirdly, God kept His Word about the Gospel and provided for our ability to engage in truly realistic optimism. So where we might be tempted at times to say 'why in the world is this happening?' we can actually replace that with 'God is doing something with this.' Now I have the responsibility and the opportunity to go to Him and say 'What is it that I need to understand that would furnish me, make me more useful and effective in light of this so called negative so how can I capitalize on whatever there is to be learned by this in order to use it in the promotion of the Gospel?' He did this because of what Jesus did for us.

I will hone in on one word here. I could talk about justification or propitiation which refers to Jesus taking the holy, righteous wrath of the Father in our place and we don't down play that at all but I think the area we can best focus in light of what we're saying here is redemption. Redemption doesn't refer to conversion in general but redemption refers to that part of the work of Christ on the cross where He by ransom payment delivered us out from under the dominance, bondage, power and control of sin in our life. That in and of itself gives us the right to be very optimistic, because it gives us the right to quote with confidence in first person truly, 'I can now do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'

It gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves and to come to some learning conclusions here, as to who we functionally are and who we functionally can be in our relationship with Him. Why? It is because God kept His Word. He not only kept His Word in the negative in bringing death or that sin brought death, but He kept His Word in the keeping, the development, fulfillment, and the application of the covenant and He also kept it to the point that we now understand by the opening of the Holy Spirit in our eyes, the Gospel. We can look at things from the perspective of knowing Christ and belonging to Him. We don't have to be overcome by things. We will be overcome at times but in knowing Christ we have the ability to proceed, even optimistically, in what we would call negative circumstances.

In conclusion, have you recognized the significance of the death process as well as death itself? Have you recognized it to the point that you don't have to be overcome either by physical death where your soul will live beyond it but also though you'll have all kinds of difficulties and sufferings that will contribute to your death? We don't have to be overcome because He has kept His Word, even over a long period of time. Finally, all that is ours in Christ and the Gospel will help us overcome. How are you handling the death process? Have you come to grips with His keeping of the covenant? Do you see the liberty and power that, that furnishes to you and me not just figuratively speaking, but literally speaking for every situation of every day?

There are two kinds of people reading this today – those who know Christ and those who don't. So you answer this question according to your own situation. How have you and how will you respond to the true reality that God always keeps His Word even that Word where He said He would provide a Savior? It is my prayer and the prayer of many at this church that not a single person will leave this just focusing on the negative but enjoying the optimism that can come strongly and truly out of intimacy with Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You that You always keep Your Word, whether it's a promise You make somewhere in the Scripture or whether it's a declaration of outcome that You made as You did of the eating of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. You always keep Your Word and we thank You that we get the benefit of that because Christ in His birth, life, suffering, death, burial and resurrection are all the keeping of a promise, the keeping of declarations of bringing glory to Yourself by His bringing Salvation to us. I don't know what this has brought to your mind but you do and you know what you need to say to God about it, whether it's a confession or a repentance or rejoicing or whatever the case brings. Continue this with the Lord until you are done with it, rightly so. Our Father in heaven, we thank You that the Word of God, the Word of Christ, the Word of the Holy Spirit, abides forever. We wither and have difficulties and we go through the death process but You are still with us, have called us to Yourself and have called us to saving faith in Christ. We pray for those who need You today and as we leave here may Your grace, mercy, and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless, keep and strengthen in Christ all who are His forever, Amen.