

Isaiah 28 23-29 Nov 12

²³ Give ear and hear my voice, Listen and hear my speech. ²⁴ Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods? ²⁵ When he has leveled its surface, Does he not sow the black cummin And scatter the cummin, Plant the wheat in rows, The barley in the appointed place, And the spelt in its place? ²⁶ For He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him. ²⁷ For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin; But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick, And the cummin with a rod. ²⁸ Bread *flour* must be ground; Therefore he does not thresh it forever, Break *it with* his cartwheel, Or crush it *with* his horsemen. ²⁹ This also comes from the LORD of hosts, *Who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance.*

The title for the sermon this morning would be “God is the best farmer”

Last week we introduced this outline:

28:1-6 The two crowns : What are we proud of

28:7-22 The two words: What are we hearing

That is where we ended. We will take up on part 3 of the outline this morning.

The two outcomes: 28:23-29 Can we trust God’s ways with us

What we will see in our text is a lesson in farming. But naturally, it is **more** than a lesson in farming. It is a statement of God’s wisdom in producing the desired outcome in His people. But it uses farming as an illustration.

²³ Give ear and hear my voice, Listen and hear my speech.

Does that quote sound familiar? Doesn’t it sound a lot like Mark 4:3? Jesus is about to give a parable about farming and He says “Listen”. Then when He is done talking about farming He says, “**He who has ears, let him hear.**”

Remember, Isaiah is still talking to the group who had the problem with **precept upon precept** listening. When God spoke they heard like a cat hears. I saw a cartoon once that showed the contrast in how a dog hears and how a cat hears. The cartoon showed a dog listening to its master and you saw dot dot dot **food** dot dot dot **walk** dot dot dot **the dogs name**. Then it showed how a cat hears. The owner is speaking but what the cat hears is represented by just a steady stream of dots. The input of the master is not important enough to intrude into the cats valuable time.

That is how the Israelites were being portrayed here. The words of God were a simple stream of dots. They had nothing to do with what the people were going to do next.

So in essence Isaiah chides them here. Listen up. Pay attention. Get this. How often does this have to happen in our lives? How often does God have to move to get our attention, to free us from perpetual cat hearing?

You know, sometimes I don't know how God puts up with us. How many times have we lived in self imposed misery just because we would not **find** and **put into place** what God said. And in fact, in a lot of instances we know exactly what God says. We just want what **we want** more than we want what **God wants**. Doesn't that explain much of our behavior? Had we just listened, had we just heeded, had we just obeyed, we would have been dramatically better off.

So maybe we should **just learn**. How about that? Wouldn't that be novel?

Another thing we see over and over is that listening must not come naturally. It must not come automatically. Just because God speaks does not mean that we are taking in what He has to say. It takes intention on our part.

When we were raising kids we had a simple principle. If we spoke to our children and they were close enough to hear with their ears what we said, we acted as if they **heard** what we said. So if we gave a command and they did not obey, they suffered the consequences. If they were surprised because they clearly weren't listening to what we said, well tough luck. It was their job as children to listen.

We trained them to understand the negative consequences of not listening. They understood that the burden was on them to tune into what we were saying. That was their job. It was not our job to track them down and intrude into their little brains. It didn't take long until when **we were talking they were listening**. The burden was not on us to make them hear. The burden was on them to listen. It made life vastly easier for both parties and they never learned the "playing dumb" game.

So many people make a mistake by letting their kids off the hook when the child says, I didn't hear you. That is a mistake to train a kid like that, because God does **not let US off the hook** when **we don't listen**. When we train our kids that giving that clueless look will get them off the hook, we aren't doing them any favors.

And we will continue to see that clueless look because it works. And worse, we are training them to play that game with God, but God doesn't buy it. He won't play that game. If we have His word, and His word is clear, saying, "but I didn't know" isn't going to buy us leverage with God. Ignorance is no excuse with God when God has clearly spoken. When God's word says "listen", He means it.

And He has just said listen. What is coming next is important information.

²⁴ Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods?

I was talking to Mark's dad in the spring. He was concerned that he couldn't get his corn planted because it was too wet to plow. He finally got it in. I'm not sure how the corn did this year, but imagine this. Say he planted the first week of June. And then at the end of June he said, you know, I didn't get to plow early so maybe I should plow twice. And then maybe mid July he plows again. If plowing

the first time is so productive, wouldn't doing it again and again be that much better.

We all know that would be stupid. All it would do is kill the plants that the first plowing allowed to be planted. And the goal of the farmer is not the plowing. The goal is producing a good crop of food.

Isaiah 28:25

²⁵ When he has leveled its surface, Does he not sow the black cummin And scatter the cummin, Plant the wheat in rows, The barley in the appointed place, And the spelt in its place?

When Ruth has her garden plowed, does she sit back and say isn't that nice? My garden is plowed. I will relish that thought and live in the enjoyment of it. No. She takes that as a sign that her work is ready to begin. And she takes the seeds and plants she has purchased and sets about putting them into the ground that has been plowed. Now if any of her children help her, please forgive me in letting you out of the illustration.

But the point is, there is another **step to accomplish** to get the end result. If she is going to have a useful crop, she has to carry through with the next stage. She won't ask someone to plow over and over again in hopes that will produce something. She won't just stop at the plowing in hopes that a good crop will mysteriously show up. She will plant her crops in the place that she has already assigned them in her head. This is a very intentional process. None of it just happens. Thought and work go into each step. And each step happens in a planned sequence. There is nothing happenstance or coincidental about it. It originates in mind. It is thought through and accomplished.

Isaiah 28:26

²⁶ For He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him.

Now Isaiah addresses the question, where did the farmer learn that? And the answer is that He learned it from God. Exactly how He learned it from God is not really the point. We could prove a couple of different ways that it was from God that man learned how to survive on planet earth. But that is not our focus this morning. The point is that man is reproducing something God already knew. It was something God understood and was the expert in. God knows gardening. After all, God planted the first garden.

God knows gardening.

. ²⁷ For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin; But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick, And the cummin with a rod. ²⁸ Bread *flour* must be ground; Therefore he does not thresh it forever, Break *it with* his cartwheel, Or crush it *with* his horsemen.

There is something wonderful for us here. The farmer only uses the amount of force required to produce the maximum crop He is after. He knows exactly what each different kind of crop requires to get the best outcome. He isn't going to treat a tomato like he does wheat. He is not going to grind a tomato in a grinder when he gets it out of its skin. We look at that and we think, yes. That would be stupid. No farmer would be that stupid. He would never get the results he is after if he is that simple.

²⁹ This also comes from the LORD of hosts, *Who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance.*

Here we have the point of our text. A good farmer shows that he knows what he is doing by the way he goes about his farming. And he learned that skill from God. But clearly Isaiah is not talking about farming. He is talking about God's ultimate crop. He is talking about what He is after on planet earth. It is the crop of the redeemed. It is the crop of His people. Do you see the bottom line in this discourse?

God always has a life enriching purpose for everything He does in the lives of His people. This gardener who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance will produce the best crops the best way. And every step will be perfectly timed and executed for the biggest effect. That is the point.

Now let's apply this to the direct context.

God was dealing with His people, the Jewish nations. He was sending intruders. He was using famines and disasters. He was sending very hard things. Mixed with that would be blessings of deliverance. He was sending miracles and angels slaughtering hundreds of thousands of enemies.

God was farming. God was out to produce a crop of people who were faithful to Him. God spared Jerusalem in 701 BC. God destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Why? He was farming. He was producing an end product. He wanted humans who believed in Him and trusted Him and glorified Him. That was the end He was working toward. He wanted a crop. And his efforts would perfectly produce that. He would not apply an ounce of pressure more than what was needed. He would have no useless steps. Everything He did would have a fruitful purpose.

Everything would be appropriate to accomplish His heavenly end. That is what the hearers in Isaiah's day would have gotten. The cat hearers were blowing off God's message, but Isaiah delivered it anyway. And His message pointed to the perfection of God's actions to produce the fruit of Godliness in the people of God in that day. And odds are most of them still heard... Bla bla bla.

Next let's apply this principle to the work He has **for us to do.**

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

⁵ Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you

believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field.

Christians are all farmers. But not of corn and rye and barley. We are farmers in the crop of God- believers. In Corinthians Paul is planting and Apollos is watering. But what about plowing. The Bible is so rich with farming imagery. We find a mention of plowing in Hosea.

Hosea 10:11-15

¹¹ Ephraim *is* a trained heifer That loves to thresh *grain*; But I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull *a plow*. Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods." ¹² Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For *it is* time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you. ¹³ You have plowed wickedness; You have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, Because you trusted in your own way, In the multitude of your mighty men. ¹⁴ Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, And all your fortresses shall be plundered As Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle--

Jeremiah 4:3

³ For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns.

God places the responsibility upon men to plow up their hearts. Now we know that this cannot be done without God's work in a person's life. But none the less, that is what we are called to do. We are to break up the fallow ground. This refers to the areas of our heart that are not prepared for the seed of the word of God. It is where the Word of God would fall and we would not respond to it. It already has a crop of wickedness and rebellion. It is the bla bla bla part of us. The passage says you plowed wickedness, you reaped iniquity, and then you fed on the fruit of those lies. Why? It all comes back to trust. We see this over and over. When you trust in yourself, you trust in lies. When you believe lies, they produce a crop of sin. When that happens in a garden, it needs seriously plowed. The million dollar question is, where is that part in us? What section of the garden of our heart looks like that? Where does it keep putting out bad fruit? If we can't see it, we need to ask God to show us. And you know what? The people who love you the most might know exactly where that is. Because they have to deal with the repercussions of you not dealing with it. A stranger probably can't help you with this. They might be impressed **with your words**. But those closest to you know better. They have experienced your fallow ground. They have

experienced the part of you where you really don't care what God said. They know the part where you are going to respond in the way you find to your liking. So we must do the plowing in our hearts as God graciously provides His truth and insight.

It is then that people can plant the word. They can apply the Word where we need it the most. That is what Paul did. He sowed. And it was a wonderful ministry. It is one that everyone should **have a part in** with some people in their lives. We lay out the Gospel for the first time to someone. Or we explain it in a way they understand it. But that isn't the end. Just planting a seed isn't enough. It needs the climate to grow in. It needs the water. So in just the right time Apollos came along and somehow he gave these people just what they needed in the Word to encourage that seed to grow. Was it the same thing as what Paul did? No. Not exactly. Apollos must have had different gifts. He must have emphasized a different portion of truth than Paul did. But whatever the case God used it to produce exactly what He wanted in this crop.

Now who will harvest this crop?

We are sent as laborers in this harvest. But we are really doing our best to see that there will be something to harvest. This is what the harvest is like.

Matthew 13:30

³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' '

I believe it is angels who fulfill this task. They are the harvesters. And by the time of the harvest, everything has pretty much displayed what it really is. It is clear what the fruit is that God went out of His way to maximize and what the tares are that would never ever become wheat. It would be impossible for them to be so. So, in all of this we see that we are heavily involved in God's farming. We are playing a part in this most amazing heavenly project. We are to be acting like the farmers in Isaiah's message, learning from God exactly how we are to go about producing this eternal crop for God's harvest.

But now let's apply this text to God. Let's apply it to what He is doing in our lives. Look at what is happening in our text. Plowing, sowing, threshing and grinding are all happening. Let me ask you. Do any of those words sound pleasant if you happen to be the soil or the crop? I don't think I would look forward to grinding day if I were wheat.

Look at this passage about Christ the farmer.

John 15:1-8

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word

which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Here, instead of plowing, sowing, threshing and grinding we have pruning. Oh boy. That is a lot better...

But notice the goal of every single one of these farming metaphors. Fruit. God is doing every single thing He does in the life of a believer with a positive purpose in mind. Every single thing.

Even in our text, no force is ever used above what is necessary. Have you ever had someone come at you with guns blazing when all they would have had to do is gently tell you the truth? Well God doesn't do that. He disciplines us for sure. And sometimes it really hurts. I have had disciplines that have me **still** pondering the lessons I learned. I still feel the smart. But it is never more than what is needed to produce the desired fruit.

Look at your life right now. Are there things that really trouble you? Often there are. It seems impossible in this life to avoid them. But if what we read this morning is true, there is no **unnecessary** pain in your life. There is no unproductive pain in your life. There is no **needless** pain other than the pain we experience **because we are rebellious** against God. The life events are producing something good. God will not use any force greater than is needed to produce the desired fruit.

Now, what happens when our kids buck our discipline? What happens when they get stubborn and will not accept our correction? We all know what happens. If we are decent parents their lives get a lot rockier. Their pain becomes more intense. But if a word will produce the proper result, which parent in here will spank their child just for the fun of it? Or because we have a quota of spanking we want to reach this month.

No. We aren't good parents, but most of us are better than that. Look at your life. It might be full of pain. It might be full of turmoil. It might be full of disappointment. But if you are submissive to God, none of it is meaningless. None of it is purposeless. None of it is unnecessary.

God is at work, not just to get you through the gates of heaven, but that you would bear much fruit here and now. Maybe that is fruit of the spirit. Maybe it is fruit of saved souls. But anything you experience is at the hands of a perfect

farmer. He knows exactly what is needed to produce the crop and that is exactly what He will give to you.

Matthew Henry says this. **The word of God, so the rod of God is thus wisely made use of. Afflictions are God's threshing-instruments, designed to loosen us from the world, to separate between us and our chaff, and to prepare us for use. And, as to these, God will make use of them as there is occasion; but he will proportion them to our strength; they shall be no heavier than there is need. If the rod and the staff will answer the end, he will not make use of his cart-wheel and his horsemen. And where these are necessary, as for the bruising of the bread-corn (which will not otherwise be got clean from the straw), yet he will not be ever threshing it, will not always chide, but his anger shall endure but for a moment; nor will he crush under his feet the prisoners of the earth. And herein we must acknowledge him wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.**

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I want the painful things to go away. I want a God zap to remove the struggle points in my life. I don't want to feel that tension.

Sometimes I read this:

James 1:2-4

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

And I think. You know what. I wouldn't **mind** lacking some things if I could just get their trials to go away. I don't want hard. I want easy. I don't mind if this plant isn't bearing everything it could. I don't mind if my hull isn't knocked off and I end up being stuck in someone's teeth. I just want to enjoy this life.

But that will not do with God. He will not be satisfied until we glorify Him like we are designed to.

Notice that the testing of your faith **PRODUCES** something. That is how it is with God and His kids. He is always **producing** something.

Jarrold is a perpetual farmer. He gets it. At the end of the day he will not be satisfied unless his ground is producing something. If it doesn't do good this year, he is determined that, if it is in his power, he will make it produce better next year.

He will spend as many hours in that field as are necessary to get the maximum crop out of his field.

And you know what? At the end of the year when all of his potatoes are ready to harvest, do you think Jarrod is going to be found lounging next to his fire in his living room? No. He will be trying to get every last potato. Why? They are his crop. They are the reason for his heavy investment of time and effort.

Do you get this?

That is **what God is doing**? And that is **why** God is doing it.

James 5:7-8

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Do you get this? God is the farmer. And God is waiting until harvest time. And if this were Jarrod's field we would be telling the potatoes- be patient. Jarrod is not going to forget you. You are the reason he went through so much trouble. Don't worry. You will be picked. You will be removed from this field. And everything you went through? It will be worth it.

That is the comfort our souls are to glean this morning. We have the perfect farmer. He knows how to best produce a crop of believers and he is, right now, using the proper force necessary to produce that crop. And we are the fruit. So we can know for sure. If God put this much work into us, He is not going to forget about us. He has a sure and secure purpose for us. And He is the best farmer. These crops are going to be collected and put somewhere close to the farmer, somewhere safe, somewhere where they can best be used.