

Like Rain and Snow

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. – Isaiah 55:10, 11

It is difficult for a city boy like myself to appreciate “the rain and the snow” through the filter of Isaiah’s audience. Israel’s commerce was largely agricultural. But even the modern farmer, with his access to modern irrigation technologies, has to navigate through significant historical distance to appreciate rain and snow as vividly as did his ancient counterparts.

It is not as if I had never contemplated the rain and snow. I studied the science of precipitation in high school. I have been soothed by a gentle rain or snow. I have been agitated by a seemingly endless rain or snow. I have been captivated at the beauty of rain and snow. I remember a summer hail storm in the mountains of New Mexico that left the landscape completely white, as if covered by snow. That was pretty fascinating.

For various reasons ranging from contemplative to petty, I have considered “the rain and the snow.” But, I have not often considered them according to their most basic purpose, to nurture and to replenish life. Isaiah’s reference to “the rain and the snow” is analogous to God’s Word. It occurs to me that I also attend to His Word sometimes for reasons less than a simple yearning to be nurtured by the Creator.

1) I have read God’s Word as “something to know”. I grew up with church, Bible School, camp, *etc.* People still accuse me of being competitive. Undeniably, those competitive juices flowed even in the realm of learning the Bible. For some reason that certainly falls short of virtue, it was important for to me to know the Bible best so as to outscore everyone else in a Bible Quiz, to be the fastest at “Bible drills” or to rack-up the most points at camp. In the meantime, I have met a few adults who are voracious learners in every discipline to which they apply themselves. During their “Christian phase”, they gleaned vast knowledge and appeared to be growing believers. But, as quickly as the interest was born, it died ... choked out by a new curiosity, the chance to learn and experience something else.

2. I have read God’s Word as a drug. Many times, crisis and pain would drive me to the Bible. God’s Word is a certainly a good place to turn under such circumstances. Still, honesty compels me to confess that much crisis and pain might have been avoided had my relationship with God’s Word been more basic in the first place.

3. I have read God's Word out of obligation. I would study God's Word less for joy than for obedience, duty or fear. Knowing God's will is, after all, a believer's obligation. As a preacher, I may perceive this duty more acutely than others. In a sense, it's my "job" to study the Bible. And, if I start to "phone-in" my efforts, someone will inevitably catch on to me.

Let us each resolve to know God's Word for His purposes. God made His will known to us so that our sinful lives might be restored, nurtured and replenished. These other motives I have mentioned are not without value altogether, but those values pale as I consider how, like "the rain and the snow", God's Word has been given to men as an expression of divine love and provision.

"Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law." - Psalm 119:18

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