

July 17, 2011 by Steve Brandon



Vision and Values

(Various)

1. Our Vision (2 Kings 7)

2. Our Values (Isaiah 55)

It's important for every organization to have a vision: what the organization is striving for, what the organization is seeking to accomplish. It's important for every organization to have it's values: how it's going to obtain the vision. This is true of businesses, clubs, sports teams, and also churches.

This morning at Rock Valley Bible Church, I want to preach a message entitled, "Vision and Values," just to help us again clarify what we are doing and where we are going as a church. Why do we as a church exist? What is our purpose? What is our function? What are we seeking to accomplish?

Now, obviously, as a church, we are here for God. The church is important to God. Jesus, Himself, said, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). The church is His people, who give Him glory. But, the church is also for us. We need the church. We need the fellowship and the encouragement that comes when we gather with other believers and worship the Lord. Finally, we are also here for others. We are here as God's representatives to proclaim the gospel and bring those who aren't saved into His kingdom.

And so, any church vision statement must include these things in it. How we worship God and walk with God and witness for God. How we exalt the Lord and encourage the saints and evangelize the world. Here's the way that we say it: "We exist to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory." That is, our existence (as individuals and as a church) is to find our satisfaction and delight in God. And then, as we have opportunity, we want others to know the joy that we have found in Christ, and see His glory extended throughout the world. "We exist to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory."

And some of this ought to be quite natural. I mean, when you are a satisfied customer, you have little trouble selling your product. Take, for instance, our roof. In recent days, we had to replace our roof. Shingles were coming off the thing on a daily basis. And so, we got several quotes from several companies. We evaluated them and decided to go with the company who did the roof across the street from us. They seemed very professional and hard-working. And so, the company came and did an excellent job. We were thoroughly delighted with the work that they did. The workers worked very hard. They finished the job in two days. When they went home after the first day, they left no trace. They had dumped all of the shingles in a trailer, which they carted off after the first day. They had laid out tarps upon the ground. They had placed some boards upon the house, thereby protecting the house. They covered some of our landscaping plants, that they might not be injured. They picked up every loose shingle from the ground. The only way that you could know that we were having our roof replaced is because of the shingles that were left on the roof for the next day. On top of this, the workers were very well behaved and very friendly.

It takes little for us to tell others of this company, because we are so satisfied. I have told many people of how satisfied I am with the job that this company did for us. They didn't even ask, but I still told them.

Contrast this with our neighbor next door. I told you last week that they had their roof replaced as well. Their house is about the same age as ours. Their program didn't go quite so smoothly. First of all, they signed a contract in the spring sometime to have the roof done. However, after doing so, they heard nothing from the company for a long time -- for several months. They thought about going with another company. Finally, they called the roofers, asking about the status of the job. They said that they were busy, but would get to their house soon. A bit later, they had a crane show up and place the shingles on the home, where they sat for a few days. When they came, they didn't take care of the plants around the house.

Now, think about these neighbors recommending a roofer. Do you think that they will recommend their roofer? I don't think so.

This is our vision: to so delight in God that we can hardly contain ourselves in telling others of Him. "We exist to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory." I do believe that this is the pattern of the Bible. We are to so find our satisfaction in God that we cannot help but to tell others of Him.

Now, it's not that everything is going so well for us that we have no troubles and hardships. We live in a sin-cursed world. To expect that we will have no troubles in life is unrealistic. It's not that. Rather, we have discovered the great blessings of walking in His ways. We have cleansed our consciences from our sins by trusting in our Savior. We have found such peace of mind and contentment, that when the difficulties of life have come, we have found God to be entirely trustworthy to carry us through the trials of life. And we have so found our joy in Jesus that we can barely help but to tell other people of what He is like, thereby extending His glory.

This can take place with our family, with our co-workers, with our neighbors, with our friends, with those in foreign lands -- wherever the Lord may choose to take us. Such teaching is all over the Bible. Jeremiah spoke of the word of God like fire in his bones that he had to release by telling others.

When Peter and John were told not to speak any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17), they couldn't help it. They were so transformed by the power of God, that they could do no other. They said, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Paul said it this way, "We believe, therefore we ... speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). Peter said it this way, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. So that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

For my message this morning, I want to take an obscure story found in the Old Testament that's a great illustration of this. It's one of my favorite stories in all of the Bible. So, turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Kings, chapter 7.

1. Our Vision (2 Kings 7)

In this text we find Israel in trouble. The Arameans have come upon them. They have surrounded the capital city of Samaria, cutting off all supplies entering the city. As a result, there was a famine in the city and people were starving. In fact, things were so bad, that mothers were eating their children, just to survive (2 Kings 6:28-29). It was a horrific scene inside the city walls.

And then, in the midst of the trouble, we hear Elisha promising good days. So, let's pick up the story in 2 Kings, chapter 7, verse 1, ...

2 Kings 7:1

Then Elisha said, "Listen to the word of the LORD; thus says the LORD, 'Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.'"

This was a shocking pronouncement. It would be like saying, "Tomorrow, gas prices will be a dollar per gallon." If I would say that, I'm sure that you would say, "Steve, you're crazy! Gasoline prices have been hovering near \$4 per gallon for the past year. There's no way that it's going down to a dollar -- tomorrow." This was the reaction of the royal official.

2 Kings 7:2

The royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning answered the man of God and said, "Behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" ...

But, it was the word of the LORD (7:1), and Elisha was confident. So, he said, ...

2 Kings 7:2

... "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it."

In verse 3, the scene shifts from inside the city to outside the city.

2 Kings 7:3-4

Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die? If we say, 'We will enter the city,' then the famine is in the city and we will die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the Arameans. If they spare us, we will live; and if they kill us, we will but die."

These four men were in a hopeless situation. They were lepers, outcasts of society because of their contagious disease. They had to sit at the gates, away from the people of the city. Things were hard enough as it was for their lives. But, with the famine, things reached the point of desperation. With no food brought to them outside the gates, they were starving to death outside, just as they were inside the city. And so, they determined to place themselves at the mercy of the Arameans. This was not a good idea. The Arameans weren't interested in taking prisoners. They were interested in conquering Samaria. And the mere fact that Samaria didn't surrender, but forced the Arameans to surround the city and wait them out, could only have heightened their hatred for their enemy.

But, as bad as their situation was with the Arameans, possible death at the hands of the Arameans was still better than certain death by the famine. So, off they went.

2 Kings 7:5

They arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arameans; when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there.

This was a shock to these lepers. They had expected to be taken captive and brought to the commander to determine their fate. Instead, they entered a ghost town. Nobody was there. Verses 6 and 7 explain what happened, ...

2 Kings 7:6-7

For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, even the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, "Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life.

These sounds didn't come out of nowhere. I believe that they were the sounds of an angelic army.

Perhaps you remember the interchange that Elisha had with his servant in the previous chapter. This servant had seen the Aramean army circle the city of Dothan and was afraid. He said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). Elisha prayed, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see. And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17). I believe that the angelic army in Dothan came and surrounded Samaria, and made the noises that caused the Arameans to flee for their lives. In verse 8, we pick up the response of the lepers, ...

2 Kings 7:8

When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank, and carried from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid them; and they returned and entered another tent and carried from there also, and went and hid them.

First of all, they satisfied their hunger. "They ... ate and drank." Then, they began to plunder the camp, entering tent after tent, carrying away their "silver and gold and clothes."

In many ways, they were enjoying the grace of God. They were enjoying their new-found life. They were enjoying their new-found riches. They were expecting death, but instead received an abundant life. All the food that they could eat, all the money that they could carry away, whatever they found was theirs. But, there was a problem. It comes in verse 9, ...

2 Kings 7: 9

Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household."

Here's the second part of our vision statement. "We exist to enjoy the grace of God and to extend the glory of God." To have the first part and neglect the second part is sinful. The lepers acknowledged, "We are not doing right." These lepers were enjoying the first part. They were enjoying the grace. But, they were neglecting the second part. They were keeping silent, and not telling anyone of the wondrous provision that God had provided. They weren't extending the glory of God.

It was a day of good news! They knew that it wasn't right to keep it to themselves. They had to tell the good news to the king!

This is really the heart of our vision as a church. Yes, we enjoy the grace of God -- and why not? Just as the situation of the lepers was hopeless and they were desperate, so also was our situation dark and helpless. According to Ephesians 2, we were "dead in our sins" (Eph. 2:1). We were "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). We were "without God" (Eph. 2:12). We were "without hope" (Eph. 2:12). Just as the lepers stumbled into the camp of the Arameans and found that they could take of their riches. So also we came upon the cross of Christ. We discovered that Jesus died upon the cross for our sins.

Whereas the wages of our sins was death, Jesus gave us the gift of eternal life. He died upon the cross for our sins. God took His life in exchange for ours. And now, we are a new creation in Christ! And the blessings that we have in Jesus are abundant!

In fact, in Ephesians 1, Paul prays that we might fully understand everything that we have in Christ Jesus. He prays, ...

Ephesians 1:17-19

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Indeed, this is a day of good news! We are amazed at the grace of God in our lives that would save sinners like us. We sing of the marvelous grace of our loving Lord. We love to hear the glories of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And right we should. We are like the lepers in the Aramean camp! We ought to enjoy the food and the drink and the silver and gold. But to stay silent about that good news would be a sin!

Jesus has sent us into the world to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; Nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good needs and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16). We have a light in the gospel of Christ. We are to shine that light.

It's what we want. We want others to celebrate with us in the joy that we have found in Jesus. And as others join in, we extend the glory of God. And the only way that this can happen is if we open our mouths and tell others, just as these lepers did. Look at verse 10, ...

2 Kings 7:10-11

So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and they told them, saying, "We came to the camp of the Arameans, and behold, there was no one there, nor the voice of man, only the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they were." The gatekeepers called and told it within the king's household.

You would think that such news would be received with great joy and enthusiasm. Samaria was safe! The Arameans fled! There is no longer any reason to fear! You can go and plunder their riches! But there was doubt. Just like many have with the gospel, they can't believe that you are saved by believing in Jesus. It's too easy. Surely, you need to do something. Maybe those of the church are merely interested in my money. Perhaps it's a trap. The king thought it was a trap.

2 Kings 7:12-14

Then the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "I will now tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone from the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'When they come out of the city, we will capture them alive and get into the city.'" One of his servants said, "Please, let some men take five of the horses which remain, which are left in the city. Behold, they will be in any case like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it; behold, they will be in any case like all the multitude of Israel who have already perished, so let us send and see." They took therefore two chariots with horses, and the king sent after the army of the Arameans, saying, "Go and see."

The king sent to investigate the matter, which is only reasonable. You would not have expected the Arameans to flee and leave everything behind. It could easily have been a trap. The king was being wise.

So also with our faith. It's reasonable to look into matters. I mean, when you hear for the first time that your sins can be entirely forgiven by believing in Jesus, it may seem a bit odd. It may not seem possible. How can faith in Jesus forgive all our sins? How can God punish Him in our place? But, when you investigate it, you will find it to be true -- just as those who investigate the camp found the Aramean camp deserted, just like the lepers had told them. Verse 15, ...

2 Kings 7:15-16

They went after them to the Jordan, and behold, all the way was full of clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. Then the messengers returned and told the king. So the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. Then a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.

This was exactly according to the prophesy of Elisha (verse 1). Within one day, the famine was lifted and the food was cheap. God's word was found to be true, just like God's word always is. In fact, even the prophecy of the royal officer turned out to be true. Remember verse 2? - "you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it"?

2 Kings 7:17-20

Now the king appointed the royal officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; but the people trampled on him at the gate, and he died just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him. It happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Two measures of barley for a shekel and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, will be sold tomorrow about this time at the gate of Samaria." Then the royal officer answered the man of God and said, "Now behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" And he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it." And so it happened to him, for the people trampled on him at the gate and he died.

Well, there is the vision of Rock Valley Bible Church. "We exist to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory." Let's turn now to our values, ...

2. Our Values (Isaiah 55)

These are our core beliefs. These are the things that we hold dear in our hearts. These are the things that characterize us. These are things that drive us. For the sake of continuity, I have tried to pull all of these things from one passage of Scripture. So, turn with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 55.

We have three core values. The first is this ...

a. We believe in the power of the gospel.

Romans 1:16 says it: "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). It's through the message of the gospel that people are transformed. Literally, they become "New Creatures" (2 Cor. 5:17). Where once they were dead spiritually, they have come alive. Where once they were blind, now they see. Where once they didn't understand, they have come to understand. Where once they were hostile toward God, they become a friend of God.

People are transformed, not because of something that they do. It's not because of some moral revolution within them. It's not because of their own resources. Rather, it's because of the graciousness of God to save. It's a powerful message.

Paul said, "the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). You say, "What is the gospel?" There are many ways to say it. You can describe the gospel in light of the entire message of the Bible. Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Creation - *God created a perfect world.* Fall - *But man sinned and brought the world into misery.* Redemption - *Jesus came to redeem the world by dying on the cross.* Restoration - *The end of all things will bring order back into the universe.* That's one way to say it.

You can describe the gospel in terms of God's work. God, Man, Christ, Response. God - *Is a holy, perfect, creator God.* Man - *Fell in sin and*

is broken and condemned to hell. Christ - Came to die on the cross for our sins to redeem us from hell. Response - We need to repent and believe in Jesus.

You can sing it, ...

Holy God, in love, became.
Perfect man to bear my blame.
On the cross he took my sin.
By his death I live again.

You can say it like Paul did: "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas [and all the other apostles]" (1 Cor. 15:3-11), thereby proving Himself to be alive.

The power of the gospel isn't merely for unbelievers. It is for believers as well.

Recently, I have been studying the life of Francis Shaeffer. In 1952, he went through a spiritual crisis in his life. He saw little of the reality of Biblical Christianity within him. And so, he went all the way back to his agnosticism to think about what he really believed. After months of re-thinking, he said this, ...

As I rethought my reasons for being a Christian I saw again that there were totally sufficient reasons to know that the infinite-personal God does exist and that Christianity is true. In going further, I saw something else which made a profound difference in my life. I searched through what the Bible said concerning reality as a Christian. Gradually I saw that the problem was that with all the teaching I had received after I was a Christian, I had heard little about what the Bible says about the meaning of the finished work of Christ for our present lives. Gradually the sun came out and the song came. [\[1\]](#)

In other words, it is the finished work of Christ that has power upon a soul to live the Christian life. And one of the core elements of the gospel is its freeness, which comes out in the first few verses of Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:1-3
"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.
Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that you may live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
According to the faithful mercies shown to David.

Do you see the freeness of the offer of salvation? It is without cost. The thirsty one here is the needy one -- the one who is in a dry and weary land with no water, the one who is looking for life and refreshment. And the Lord says, "If you are thirsty, ... come." Come to the waters. Come to the Lord.

It doesn't matter whether or not you have money -- Still come! In fact, it does matter. The call of verse 1 is to those who have no money. It's a call to the poor and needy to get what they need: food and wine and milk! It's a call to get it without money.

Our problem is that we spend money for what doesn't satisfy. We spend our money on the earthly pleasures of this life, thinking that they can give us satisfaction. But, the only thing that can ever satisfy fully is absolutely free. And it must be free. You add works to the gospel and you tear the entire house down. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Plus nothing.

You see that nothingness coming out strong here in Isaiah 55. But, you also see how satisfying it is. And there is the enjoyment of the freeness of the gospel. Verse 2, ...

Isaiah 55:2
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.

See the abundance of the God! See the abundance of forgiveness! The call comes in verse 6, ...

Isaiah 55:6-7
Seek the LORD while He may be found;
Call upon Him while He is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way

And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And let him return to the LORD,
And He will have compassion on him,
And to our God,

The forgiveness of sins comes freely, and it is the greatest delight of all who know Christ and trust in His work on the cross for our sins.

There is our first value: We believe in the power of the gospel. Therefore, as a church, we will keep the centrality of Christ in all things. Secondly, ...

b. We believe in the power of God.

That is, we believe in the total supremacy of God over all things! He created the world. He sustains the world. He has come to save the world. He will destroy the world.

It's because the earth is the LORD's. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it." He is the potter and we are the clay. Who are we to speak back to Him (Romans 9:19)?

When you search through the Bible, you will find statement after statement after statement that lifts up the absolute supremacy of God over all things.

Isaiah 46:9 - "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,
Isaiah 46:10 - "Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying,
'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'"

Unlike the idols of the land and the false gods of the peoples, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps. 115:3). It is the LORD who reigns (Ps. 99:1). He is more powerful than Behemoth (Job. 40:15). He is more powerful than Leviathan (Job. 41:1). He can thwart the plans of nations. He can smash the tower of Babel (Genesis 11).

When the nations conspire against the LORD, He laughs at their feeble plans (Ps. 2:4). He scoffs at them for thinking that they can successfully mount a rebellion against the Lord (Ps. 2:4). He put the stars in the heavens. He calls them all by name (Is. 40:26). - Not one of them is missing (Is. 40:26).

God is in total control of this universe. Abraham Kuyper, the famous Dutch theologian said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" God has no need of a counselor (Is. 40:13-14). He needs no help from us--"He is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything (Acts 17:25).

He controls the weather (Ps. 135:7). He knows the most intimate details of our lives (Ps. 139). "Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all" (Ps. 139:4). "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3).

When you search throughout the Bible, you will find no verse limiting the sovereignty and supremacy of God over all things and over all peoples. And so, We believe in the power of God. The power of God is a comfort to our souls. We know that no temptation has overtaken us, but such as is common to man, and God is able to provide the way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). We know that the trials that come upon our lives are not out of His control, but that He will accomplish His pleasure in us through them (2 Cor. 12:7-10). In other words, He can remove the thorn in our lives, but He may choose not to because of His greater purpose in our lives. When our nation is facing some turmoil and trouble, we can rest in God working His plan for His story.

There are some people -- who are well-meaning -- who will seek to limit the sovereignty of God. "Yes," they say, "God is sovereign over everything, except for the human heart. We are free to make our own decisions." "No," I say, "God is sovereign over your heart." God moves our hearts to accomplish His will. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). Isn't that what we saw last week in Hebrews 13:21, "[God is] working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

We believe in the sovereignty of God working in us. The only reason why we believe is because of God acting in our hearts to bring us to faith. You weren't born the first time because of your will. You aren't born the second time into God's kingdom because of your will, either. John 1:12-13 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). It is "by His doing [that] you are in Christ Jesus." Now, how that happens, I'm not sure. It's a bit of a mystery. But, here's what it is. It is not God's will competing against my will, as if they are both independent. No, it is my will within God's will.

Now, because of my sinfulness, I may revolt against God. And yet, God is still sovereign over my will. Admittedly, it is difficult to understand. Perhaps that's a bit of what Isaiah was getting at in verse 8, ...

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

See -- too often, people will trust in their own reason, instead of trusting in God's word. I mean, how can a sovereign God (who is sovereign over all things) hold us responsible for our sin? It must be that He isn't sovereign over our will, they conclude. But, the Bible nowhere near goes that far. In fact, if anything, the Bible goes the other way. There are many passages of Scripture that speak of God being sovereign over the will of men.

The Bible tells us explicitly that God even uses evil to accomplish His will. That's the great reality of Romans 8:28, that we know and love, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God causes, "all things," including evil things, to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. That's the story of Joseph. They meant evil, but God meant good (Genesis 50:20). And though they sent their brother to Egypt as a slave, in reality, Joseph says, "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45:8).

Regarding Pharaoh, God says, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in You, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth" (Rom. 9:17, quoting Ex. 9:16). In other words, God hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that God might be able to show forth His mighty hand in the miracles of the plagues that we might tell about them today!

Regarding the crucifixion of Christ, God was sovereign over the evil plans of man. Listen to Acts 4:27-28, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." The death of Jesus was no accident. No, it says in Isaiah 53:10, that the Lord was pleased to crush Him, that He might be our guilt offering.

And when you delve into the implications of these things, it blows your mind away. We cannot fully understand them.

I remember a man speaking one time on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. The question was proposed, "How can God be sovereign and yet hold people responsible for their sins?" I had always said, "We don't know." But, this man said something different. He said, "We cannot know." That little comment has been so helpful to me, because I can embrace the clear truth of the Scripture without being able to fully comprehend. That's why God says, ...

Isaiah 55:8-9
"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

So, let's trust Him. Let's believe in the power of God, which means that we are saved, yet only because of His sovereign will.

So, We believe in the power of the gospel. Therefore, as a church, we will keep the centrality of Christ in all things. We believe in the power of God. Therefore, as a church, we will embrace the doctrines of grace.
Thirdly, ...

3. We believe in the power of the word.

Hebrews 4:12 says it very well: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." There is a power in the word of God. When it goes out, it takes a life of itself and penetrates into the heart of people to accomplish God's purpose.

And here in Isaiah 55, you can see mention made of the power of the word of God in verses 10 and 11.

Isaiah 55:10-11
"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

When the rain comes from heaven and waters the earth, it makes plants to grow. And when there is no rain, there is no growth (look outside at our brown grass). But each tiny little water molecule does its part in causing plants to grow and in providing food for us.

And so also is God's word just as powerful and just as life-giving. It accomplishes all its purposes when it goes out. Every little verse and every little word, God uses them to accomplish His will. There are times when the word goes out and God changes people. Psalm 19:7 tells us, "the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" (KJV). There are times when the word goes out and it helps to sanctify God's people. Psalm 119:9 asks, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word." Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You."

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in truth, Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The word of God guides us in wisdom. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:99 tells us, "I have more insight than all my teachers, For your testimonies are my meditation." Psalm 119:100 says, "I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts."

The word of God is powerful for battling temptation. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He used the word of God to combat the devil. We read in Matthew 4 of three temptations that came. Each time, Jesus quoted a verse of Scripture to set the matter right. Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:16). "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only (Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13; 10:20).

The word of God is sufficient for all ministerial training. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Again, I bring up the life of Francis Shaeffer, because I have been learning about him in recent weeks. He was converted through reading the Bible. He read it, believed it, and was changed. And he went some time before he found any other Christians. He didn't even know that they still existed in the 20th century. Such is the testimony to the power of the word of God.

I think about my own life. I grew up in a church that looked at the Bible as inspiring, like any other book. As a result, we looked to the Bible for inspiration and help. But, in reality, this help could be found other places as well. As a result, I never heard the Bible really taught or proclaimed. But, when I was exposed to a church that believed that the Bible was inspired, and proclaimed the word of God, my life was radically changed. As I began learning the Scripture, I began to grow in Christ and hunger for more. I'm a pastor today in large measure because of the power that I have seen in the Scriptures to change my life. God can change your life as well through the Scriptures.

Paul said that the word needs to get out: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). It needs to get out because it is powerful.

OK, so what? We believe in the power of the word. So, we will do everything in our power to cultivate a Bible knowledge in our congregation. And it starts from the pulpit. We will preach God's word expositively. That is, from this pulpit will come a diet of opening up God's word and putting it before you, as God intended it. This is in contrast to preaching topically, where you bring your own ideas to the text.

For instance, think about my message this morning. It has not been exposition. I have not begun with a text and sought to explain its meaning when originally written and then put forth its application today. Instead, I have begun with my own ideas and have placed them upon the text of Scripture, and let the Scripture illuminate my ideas.

Now, it's not that my ideas are wrong. I think that they are Biblical. Nor is it that I believe that topical preaching is inherently wrong. Obviously, I have preached a topical message this morning. It's just that they are my ideas, and I'm using the Scripture to preach my ideas. I'm using the Bible to set forth our vision and our values. But, the reality is this. I believe that topical preaching will not be as effective as a constant diet of exposition. In other words, for your growth and your edification, it is most profitable for us as a church, to learn the Bible as it was written. Thereby, it will come with full force in our lives, because it is God's message, unchanged.

It is no accident that we generally walk through books of the Bible. It is by design, because, I believe that it will be most profitable for your soul to do so. In exposition, you can go through books fast or slow. Speed isn't the issue. Rather, the original message is the issue. And sometimes, you need a broad scope to catch the intent.

There are some other benefits to this as well. Week-in and week-out, I seek to model for you how to approach the Scriptures. I seek to pull out the central thoughts. I seek to ask the right sorts of questions. I seek to expose the author's original intent. Know it or not, each week you are learning how to study your Bibles. And the word of God that is in you is working its work.

We believe in the power of the word. So we will encourage your personal study of God's word. We will encourage you to memorize it. We will encourage you to let it have its effect in your life. We will encourage you to read it together as a family, all while trusting that God will do His will through His word.

Isaiah 55:11

"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

So, at Rock Valley Bible Church, Our Vision (2 Kings 7) is that "We exist to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory." Our Values (Isaiah 55) are: We believe in the power of the gospel. Therefore, we will keep the centrality of Christ in all things. We believe in the power of God. Therefore, we embrace the doctrines of grace. We believe in the power of the word. Therefore, we teach it expositively.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 17, 2011 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Francis Shaeffer, "The Preface to True Spirituality"