

WD August 9, 2021

Pastor Matt Woods

“All That We Have Heard About”

As you watch this I am just getting home from our trip to Alaska. That is, if the bears didn't catch me, the mosquitos didn't carry me off, and all of our airplane landings went well. This was our 25th anniversary trip. We had been planning this in our heads for at least five years. Since, I am obviously recording this before I leave for this trip, I will have to fill you in on the wonders of it all next week.

Tricia and I have watched a lot of shows on Alaska. We had heard from so many of our members about Alaska from trips they had taken both on land and on cruises. So, we are anxious to finally experience what we have been hearing about. Lord willing as you see this, we were able to see McCarthy where the Kennecott Copper Mine used to be. There we will see our first glacier, the Root Glacier. Next is Fairbanks where we get the chance to fly up to the arctic circle and maybe experience some natural hot springs nearby. Of course, no trip is complete without seeing Denali. We pray for clear weather so that we can see Mt. McKinley among other things and toss about in a raft in a little white-water rafting. Then we visit Talkeetna to take a flight over Denali—again hoping for clear weather. Finally, we end up in Seward where we take an all-day boat trip touring the Fjords, and eat out on an island as part of the experience. And from what we have heard any trip in Alaska is more than one can imagine—the mountains are vast, the rivers are amazing, the wildlife is majestic, and the experience leaves a lasting impression.

Well, we've heard enough that we invested our anniversary trip to going. We have planned as carefully as we can. We've got our masks ready for the fourteen-hour travel time and as I speak to you at the time of this recording I we cannot get on that plane fast enough.

So, all of this anticipation has gotten me thinking about Romans 10 which talks about how faith comes from hearing. Consider verse 14-17. ¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

¹⁶But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

When it came to Alaska, I can honestly say I've heard enough to believe its worth going. Consequently, that means that I am ready to invest time and money into going. That's what happens when people hear the Gospel.

Thousands from all over the country side sought Jesus out because of what they had heard Him do (Mark 3:6). The same can be said of us. The hope is that when we hear about Jesus and all that He did on the cross and in the resurrection, we too would receive Him. 2 Peter 1:16 tells us, “For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” Peter makes it very clear that what he saw was all true and encourages us to believe by saying so. The scriptures are effectively the greatest witness Jesus. In it has recorded all that people saw and experienced about the Gospel. It is Good News. The Word of God has as its goal that you hear that message and believe it.

There is one other element to this passage that I do not want to overlook; It's context. Paul has been identifying Israel's failure to listen or follow the Word. Paul quotes twice in this passage from Isaiah. Not just anywhere in Isaiah but from the well-known Messianic text of Isaiah 52-53. Verse 15-“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” is from Isaiah 52:7. And verse 16—“Lord who has believed our message” is from Isaiah 53:1.

Isaiah 52-53 are associated with Jesus' suffering and death for our sins. We normally think of these chapters during Lent and on Good Friday especially. In the context of Isaiah 52-53 Isaiah is talking about the deliverance of Israel from their Babylonian exile, back to the Promised Land. Isaiah is promising a return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. God is the God of deliverances. He delivered Israel from Egypt, from Babylon, and ultimately from sin. That is Paul's greatest emphasis in this passage. So, as we listen to this text, we are to

connect those dots and understand that the ultimate deliverance is coming where God's people will be raised from the dead and brought into eternal life.

When people tell me about their trip to Alaska it is clear that it was memorable. And when I mention that I am going, they perk up and immediately talk of their own experience. And usually, they encourage me to go and see for myself. Right now, we have done that.

If we apply this idea to the Gospel, we see something very similar happening. The hope is that we would be inspired to know for ourselves the love of Jesus and the blessings of believing.

This brings me to one last thought. Where we are going is beyond words. When the Apostle John wrote down what He saw when the Lord showed Him a glimpse of heaven it is clear that he struggled with words to describe it. I've been told the landscape of Alaska is so overwhelming and beautiful that no picture can truly capture it and no description does justice. I can imagine that the same can be said of Heaven. Jesus describes it as a house, prepared for us in John 10. Heaven is our home. Revelations speaks of a great multitude dressed in white robes that no one can count; full of life, unafraid, and celebrating with roaring praise to God (Rev 7:9ff). It also speaks of glory. No need for sun or moon because the Lord gives it its light (Rev 21). We hear about it but even our imaginations cannot capture heaven's grandeur. And yet that is what is coming and it will last more than 25 years. That is what the Gospel is encouraging us to hope for and believe in because of Jesus' resurrection. God is the God of deliverances and heaven will be the ultimate deliverance. When we get there no camera or words will capture its majesty. It will be a trip of a lifetime—eternal lifetime.

So, yes, I will be ready to tell anyone about Alaska who wants to hear it. I will show you my pictures if you ask. And hopefully you will hear my stories and realize what an incredible experience it was. Likewise, if we are inspired by what we hear from the Gospel we will just as excitedly tell others about Jesus and how much you love Him and believe in Him. And by God's grace our witness will bless others to pay attention and know for themselves the Gospel and its saving promise.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on You with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30