

# Faith Leading to Fruitfulness

Isaiah 54:1b

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2017-06-11

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## Introduction

Please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 54. Last week we just looked at the first half of verse 1. And for the second sentence to make any sense, I need to give some review. Isaiah 54:1 says,

“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD.’

Why could a barren woman sing and celebrate that she is going to have children while she was still barren? Because faith looks to God's promise, not to our inability.

Last week we saw that the apostle Paul quoted this verse in Galatians 4 and used it to teach believers to walk in the Holy Spirit's power and not in their own abilities. You wouldn't think that Abraham's mess-up with Hagar and Ishmael would have anything to do with us, but it does. Paul says that even though Abraham was a believer, he messed up when he followed Sarah's advice and when he sought to fulfill God's promise in his own strength and by his own means. And why did Abraham do that anyway? Because Sarah was barren and God's promise seemed so impossible that Abraham and Sarah decided that they needed to settle for something less than God's Word had declared; something a bit more achievable. And that has always been our temptation. But when we do that, we leave the path of the supernatural and opt for the path of the possible. And what happens then? We no longer have to live by faith; we can live by the flesh. And without faith it is impossible to please God. Flesh produces flesh. When Abraham did what he could achieve in his own fleshly strength, he produced Ishmael - a disaster that has plagued mankind to the present day in the Middle East. But Paul points out that we do exactly the same thing when we try to obey God's commands or live out God's promises without God's supernatural power. Paul said,

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

It's crazy! It's irrational! But we do it all the time. Paul says that when we live our Christianity by trying harder and by pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps, we are living like the Pharisees and we are living like Abraham did with Hagar. It requires the Holy Spirit every day in our lives to produce God's Isaac.

And what do I mean by God's Isaac? I mean living out God's word by His power. For example, no Pharisee can possibly fulfill the Sermon on the Mount. Who can rejoice with exceeding great joy when being persecuted? I challenge you to try that in your own strength. You can't. So evangelical Pharisees think, "Surely that command must be hyperbole!" Who can love their enemies? Who can truly bless those who have cursed them? Who can return good for evil? Who can go the second mile with jerks who insist you go one mile? Surely these things are hyperbole? But they are not.

The whole Sermon on the Mount cuts the legs out from under a pretense Christianity and forces us to live in the realm of the miraculous; of the impossible. Jesus said that each of those kingdom blueprints are evidences of our sinship and our being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And Paul does the same. According to Galatians it takes faith to be sanctified because faith must receive everything from our bank account in heaven where we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. So that was the first lesson from this verse - that Paul applies it to living in the Spirit.

The second lesson is that once we recognize that we are barren and cannot do it on our own, that barrenness should lead us to faith rather than to giving up.

Third, we saw that faith enables us to laugh at impossibilities just like Abraham laughed. In this verse it is not the laugh of faith but singing or celebrating by faith:

“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne!

Fourth, we saw when the singing happens. It happened before there was any conception. Faith rejoices at God's fulfillment long before God answers the prayer. Faith is the title deed of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It acts upon God's promise before God fulfills the promise. It is a laugh of Abraham before Sarah conceived.

Fifth, though Abraham was active with both Hagar and Sarah, their activity was not striving or laboring when he and she produced Isaac. It was the Spirit working through them. So this says, "Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child!"

When you come to the Lord's Table you are professing that you will live by Christ's provision and work by Christ's provision and trust in Christ's provision twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. For many Christians that is an empty promise. They come to the Lord's Table on Sunday and they make this powerful profession of faith, but during the week they act as if Christ is not part of their lives. So our main application last week was to

allow your barrenness to lead you to faith in God's provision through you and to not give up.

This week's application is pretty simple - it comes from the last sentence of verse 1. It is that faith believes in more abundance than is reasonable to expect. Isaiah 54:1 goes on to say, "For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says the LORD."

In Paul's interpretation of this verse, he treats the children as metaphors of anything related to our kingdom walk. And there are two things that I want you to notice about what faith ushers us into.

First, it ushers us into "more." "For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says the LORD." I love that expression in the bible: "more...than." God's grace enables us to do more than what the flesh can do. Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. Though sin destroyed what was given to Adam, Christ will restore and give much more than was lost. Even in terms of church growth, Isaiah will go on to speak of the church outnumbering the unbelievers and eventually inheriting all nations. Paul applies the much more to church growth. So the "much more" is the first application. We should be willing to believe that God's grace achieves much more than sin and the flesh has achieved. Do you believe that?

The second application is that we should believe that "much-more-theology" before seeing the much more - even while we are desolate. A new believer might be discouraged with all the sin and all the mess that he has produced, but by faith that new believer should believe the Scripture promise that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more.

And by the way, in the next verses Isaiah goes on to apply this to eschatology - to the future of the church. The first century church was composed of 120 disciples in the upper room. It took faith to believe that such a motley crew could start a missions movement that would impact every nation. But they had faith that believed it without seeing it in the newspaper. Has the church grown much more than it had back then? Absolutely! But the Bible's promises and commands call our faith to expect much more than what we have yet seen on planet earth.

The Great Commission is an audacious command when you think about it. It takes faith to believe that Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth - yes, even authority over business and government. It takes faith to believe that all nations will become Christian nations - disciples of Christ. But faith

doesn't look at what is possible in the flesh - it believes because it is focused on the God of impossibilities. It takes faith to believe that one day every nation will obey every command in every sphere of that nation's life. That's the goal of the Great Commission. That's what the Great Commission is about - producing Christian nations; Christian civilization.

It takes faith to believe that an invisible Christ is sufficient to accomplish this audacious commission. He doesn't have to come back physically. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15 He guarantees that He won't come back physically until every enemy is conquered and all things are under His feet. It takes the laugh of faith to believe that is possible. If Jesus said that He is powerfully with us even to the end of the age, we believe it, and that settles it. So when Paul applies this phrase to the church, he is claiming an audacious "much more." God has ordained that eventually, there will be more children of the heavenly Zion than in the kingdom of Satan. True believers will outnumber unbelievers. Do you think that is ridiculous? Well, this whole verse is ridiculous apart from faith.

Lord willing next time we will look at verse 2 where God gives an audacious command to extend the tent pegs and add room for the tent even before we see the children conceived. We need to take steps of faith before it makes sense to take those steps if we are to please God.

But for today, I would just challenge you to look at your own doubts and your own impossibilities and resolve to imitate Abraham's faith, not Abraham's doubts. Though we can't do it on our own, we can sing for joy. We can laugh Abraham's laugh of faith knowing that greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world. Amen. Let's pray.