

The Desolate Isaiah 54:1

Communion Meditation by Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 9-22-2012

For the occasional times that I will be giving communion meditations in the next four months, I want to do so from Isaiah 54. It's a wonderful passage. And today I will only look at the first verse.

Isaiah 54:1 **“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.** Paul quotes this passage in Galatians 4 and applies it to the church. And his application is absolutely fascinating. In context, Paul has just finished saying that we must not be like Abraham who sought to fulfill God's promise in his own wisdom, and in the strength of what his flesh could achieve, and through Hagar he ended up producing Ishmael. He says, “That's not a good role model.” Instead, Paul says that we must be like Abraham when he believed God's promise and by faith produced Isaac. Was he involved? Yes. Could he take the credit? No. Sarah was way beyond the years that she could conceive. Isaac was a miracle child, and it was through Isaac that God would bring forth a multitude of nations. And Paul's point is that Christians can operate in the flesh or they can operate in the Spirit. When we deny that we are barren and we think we can accomplish God's will without God's power, we are operating in our own strength and God is not glorified. But when we recognize that we are barren; that nothing good dwells in our flesh; that without Christ we can do nothing, then when God produces fruit through us, He alone gets the glory. So Paul uses Abraham to tell us to walk in the Spirit by faith and to not be trying to live the Christian life by our flesh. With that as a background, let's look at this verse phrase by phrase.

First he says, **“Sing, O barren.”** The fact that we are barren should not be a cause to give up in sadness. But that's our first temptation isn't it? “Woe is me. I am barren. I can't do anything.” We've come to the wrong conclusion when we give up trying because we can't do it. Paul wants us to come to the place where we realize that we can't do it so that we will reach by faith for His power. When Isaiah says, “Sing, O barren,” he is indicating that it is possible to acknowledge that we are barren and rejoice that God's power is sufficient in our lives.

And notice when it is that we sing by faith. It's not after we have received children. It's before. He says, **“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne!”** We should be so convinced of God's provision in our lives that we can rejoice in it before we see it. We can confess it as being reality before God brings it into history. If God has promised something, it is as good as done. And God calls us to rejoice that it will be done even *before* we see any results. Now that's faith. Abraham had the laugh of faith in one passage.

He goes on to say, **“Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child!”** When a baby was born in Israel, they whooped it up; they called

out; they celebrated because hard labor had brought forth a child. But here's the odd situation where God says that the child is brought forth without labor. Isaiah is saying that the cause of the incredible growth in the church that verses 2-3 talk about is not because we conceived the children, carried the children or even groaned in labor for the children. It is the doing of the Lord. This is actually a good passage not just for individuals to live by, but it especially applies to the growth of the church. Church growth is not by man's wisdom. But Paul also applies it to the individual as well.

In Galatians 3 Paul says that what was begun by faith must be continued by faith and finished by faith. The whole of the Christian walk is receiving from God miraculously so that we can live out our lives. He says, **“This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”** Can you see why Paul quotes this passage to prove his point in chapter 4? The Christian life from start to finish needs to be lived in the empowering of the Holy Spirit. And when that happens, God busts the boundaries of the church as he describes in verses 1-3 of Isaiah 54. I'll just mention that last sentence in verse 1: **“‘For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,’ says the LORD.”** When we finally learn to rest in God as Sarah and Abraham finally were brought to do, we discover that God's provision is overflowing and more than enough. I love that expression in the bible: “more...than.” God's grace enables us to do more than what the flesh can do. That's what the Sermon the Mount was about – to expose the inability of anyone (including the Pharisees) to live by God's standards, and to challenge Christians to prove their sonship by stepping into the realm of the supernatural; by doing what no unregenerate person could do. Only by God's power can you love your enemies, bless those who curse you, and do good to those who have abused you. Scripture says that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. That's another wonderful term – “much more.” And even in terms of numbers – you can apply this to eschatology. 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.

Now I think that is a cool promise to go to the Lord's Table with. 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.

