

Barrenness Leading to Faith

Isaiah 54:1a

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

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Introduction

My communion meditation is from Isaiah 54:1. And today I will only look at the first sentence. But let me start by reading the whole 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 to me. He takes a story that is so unique that it seems as rare as one in a trillion, but Paul insists that every one of us needs to live this way. In context, Paul has just finished saying that we should not imitate Abraham's example when he sought to fulfil 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, so 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 (like Abraham did when he produced Ishmael) or they can operate in the Spirit (like Abraham did when he produced Isaac).

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 (as Paul words it) nothing good dwells in our flesh; or (as Christ worded it) that without Him 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 the first sentence of this verse:

The first part of the sentence says, “Sing, O barren.” The fact that we are barren should not make us give up in sadness. But that's our first temptation isn't it? Instead of thinking, “Because I am barren I must depend upon the Lord,” we tend to say, “Because I am barren I can't do anything. I might as well quit trying.” We've come to the wrong conclusion when we give up trying simply 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 to do it. 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.

I read an essay one time on Abraham's laugh of faith. I don't remember who wrote it. There was a laugh of unbelief on the part of Sarah and there was a laugh of faith on the part of Abraham – a laugh that was delighted in God's amazing promise - so delighted it made him laugh. So that author spoke of the laugh of faith and called us to laugh at impossibilities. Here it is singing in faith or rejoicing in faith. When faith lays hold of God's promise it banishes the burden of doubt and it fills us with joy. And this verse wants us to enter into the joy of living by faith. That's as far as I will take the theology of the first sentence, but let me press home the application as you come to the table.

I can guarantee that you have your own impossibilities that you face. And the reason I can guarantee it is because God calls all of us to do the impossible - to love the unloveable, to forgive the unforgiveable, to live out the Sermon on the Mount, etc. And the Spirit of God may be reminding you of something this morning that may seem as impossible for you to do as it was for Sarah to believe that she would have a baby. Your impossibilities may be emotional in nature, or financial, or social, or something else. And the very fact that you don't think you can do what God has commanded you to do is a call to faith, not unbelief.

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 24-7. 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 I would urge you to think of the impossible calls to sanctification in some part of your life, or His call to love in some difficult situation, or His call to forgive and not be resentful, or whatever it is that you have given up on and to laugh the laugh of faith this morning, or sing the song of faith. Rejoice in faith that

God will indeed enable you to do what He has called you to do and refuse to doubt no matter how long God may take in bringing fruitfulness out of your barrenness. Let's pray.