

Isaiah 54 1

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the chapter we read in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 54.

I'd like to look with you at the first five verses of this chapter. The prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 54, and the first five verses.

Some weeks ago, we studied together chapter 55 of this prophecy.

And I would like for the next four weeks to study with you this preceding chapter 54.

Now, I indicated then that there is a very real connection between chapters 53, 54, and 55 of this prophecy, as there is an inseparable connection between Psalms 22, 23, and 24.

[1 : 28] So, the chapter 53 of this prophecy, as you know full well, is a chapter which deals with the sufferings of the Saviour who was to come into the world.

It tells us that in this world, he bore our sins, that he was dealt with by God as a sin bearer, that the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that for our sins he was wounded, and that he was bruised, that he went to death, that he poured out his soul unto death, that he was buried in the tomb of a rich man, that he rose, and that he lives to make intercession for his people.

This chapter, chapter 54, speaks of the blessings and the glory that Jesus purchased for the church for which he died.

And that that church, throughout the whole world, in spite of, as this passage indicates, in spite of her afflictions and sufferings, that this church is to test of the victory that he, by his death, procured for her.

The church, we read here, is to become spiritually great and world extensive. Though her natural preeminence, her national preeminence, rather, is to cease, she will yet inherit the earth and embrace within her fold the nations of the world.

[3 : 48] Christ suffered and Christ died, that that church might be blessed and ultimately glorified with joy and with peace.

And that is a certainty, because the Lord, as we read here in verse 1, has said so. Chapter 55, as we saw, is the invitation that comes from God to all and sundry throughout the whole world.

He invites them to come and to taste and to experience and to share the blessings with which Jesus Christ has thus enriched his church.

Homing in now, on the first five verses of this chapter, as referred to the church of Jesus Christ, we will notice, first of all, the description that is given to her, which is as a consequence of her sins.

She's referred to as being barren, and as being desolate, and as being widowed.

[5 : 20] And then you notice, secondly in these verses, the change that God effects in our life. And then we will notice, thirdly in these verses, the extent of the change that is thus effected.

That is the extent of the change.

And then we will notice, fourthly, the effects of this change. That fear and shame and confusion are removed and are replaced with joy, with contentment, and with peace.

And finally, verse 5 brings before us the reason for this change. For thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name.

The Redeemer, thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. The God of the whole earth shall he be called. First of all, then, the condition in which these verses, the condition indicated, the church's condition has indicated for us in the first verse here.

[7 : 09] And also a reference to it in verses 4 and verse 6. This part of the prophecy was written to comfort the professing church of God in the world at the time in her captivity in Babylon.

For generations, God had warned his own professing church that if she didn't turn in penitence and in faith to himself and listen to the warnings addressed to it by the various prophets which were raised up in Israel and in Judah, that if she didn't listen to the warnings of God, God would bring her

into captivity.

The church, by and large, turned a deaf ear to these warnings. And ultimately, Israel and then Judah were led into the captivity of Assyria and of Babylon.

And the professing church of God in the world at the time found herself in a situation where she was spiritually desolate, spiritually barren, spiritually widowed, cut away from the centre and the scene of all her religious exercises in the promised land.

And what the church discovered was this, that she had brought upon herself this situation because of her own sins.

[9 : 01] The situation which she found herself was the direct consequence of her sin. She became a reproach because of her spiritual barrenness.

Time and time again, her enemies in Babylon would turn to her and say, if you are the chosen people of God and if you have been given the word of God and the sons of God, come on then, sing us one of the songs of Zion.

They said this to us, complained the church in Babylon. Barrenness in these days was associated with reproach.

The one thing that a married woman above all things did not want was barrenness. We see an indication of that in the life of Sarah and in the life of Hannah.

the misery and the sadness and the emptiness that was always associated with that in the home.

[10 : 13] And that's the language that the Lord uses here concerning his own professing church at the time. That there was spiritual barrenness and fruitfulness in her life because of her disobedience.

She was desolate. mourning her condition and lamenting the sad state in which she found herself. And because of that she was full of fear full of shame and in the grip of the bondage of her enemy. Forsaken as verse 6 tells us grieved grieved in her own spirit and rejected. It pictures for us not only a scene of barrenness and desolation but a scene of utter ruin and loneliness.

and is this not the picture the Bible gives us over and over again of the effects and the consequences of sin in the life of an individual in the life of a people in the life of a nation.

[11 : 35] There are many experiences that people have tonight and many thoughts that press in upon their spirit that remind them that remind them that not that because of their disobedience because of the waywardness of their own lives they are exposed to the loss and to the waste and to the sufferings and to the sheer emptiness that a sinful life leaves in its weight.

And there are many people tonight in the world who have reached advanced old age who look back on lost years and lost opportunities who have scars on their conscience in their heart and in their life and who know that these things are attributable to the disobedience of their own heart to the claims of God upon them.

Well that was the situation where the church found itself at this time barren desolate lonely full of a sense of shame and reproach and this is always what sin leaves.

You see sin presents itself in such alluring forms in such attractive disguises and as they used to say people don't see the hook that is inside that bait until they take the bait and they're hooked and then they realize the consequences of it all.

It is a very sorry situation a very sad picture that God paints of this people. But this is the encouragement for every individual in the world tonight for every group of people for every congregation for every church such as you and I belong to here this evening that into that situation the Lord can come to effect the most wonderful change.

[14 : 13] And so he says secondly to the church in that condition sing O barren thou didst not bear break forth into singing express your spiritual excitement with shouting thou that is not travail with child for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife saith the Lord.

Now the picture that is painted for us here now is one which is very different. Into the situation of desolation and barrenness and darkness and loneliness and shame the Lord has come and has replaced it with joy and singing with a spirit of exaltation exaltation and a spirit of rejoicing.

And this is how the Lord's redeeming power works. It always replaces with the most unattractive things.

It always replaces with the most attractive things. And here we are again introduced to the victory that was secured for the church by a redeemer as I mentioned earlier brought before us in chapter 53.

New life is breathed into this people. Their barrenness is replaced with fruitfulness. Their bondage with liberty.

[15 : 50] Their sorrow with joy. Their desolation with companionship. And this is how God changes things. As I said earlier, in the life of an individual and in the life of a people.

God in his grace comes with abundant pardon to repair what seemed irreparable, to change what seemed so unpromising and so hopeless.

There is always joy associated with the grace of God because when he touches blighted and blasted and empty lives, he brings joy and happiness and contentment into them.

It may very well be that people into his lives he has come like that are from time to time chastened by memory of wrongs done in the past.

But that doesn't the joy that he has introduced. Look at how often this has happened in the history of the Christian church.

[17 : 08] Here for example was a time as I indicated when the church was in captivity and the Lord says to her I am able to bring joy and peace and contentment into your lives.

And years after this prophecy was written the Lord did just that. He brought his people out of the captivity back into the blessedness of the promised land.

In the intertestamental period when the church again had sunk to a very low level that is the period between the prophecy of Malachi and the coming of John the Baptist God was speaking in these words to the church again and John the Baptist came as the forerunner of Jesus.

Jesus came into the midst of spiritual barrenness and desolation and darkness. The light had shone from the darkness and into the darkness and through his influence the church again began to revile. He said to his own church that when he would come the spirit when he would go the spirit would come and that the spirit would come and in accord to the word of God with mighty reviving power rushing through the whole land and it happened.

[18 : 26] That church which was lying as it was in its widowhood at the death of Jesus was revived into a joyful expression of the grace of God when the spirit came at Pentecost and thousands were added to the church and turned in penitence and in faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It happened again at the time a very low ebb in the church in the middle ages. When it would be difficult for people to identify the living church of God in the world but it was there.

It wasn't all that extensive but God raised up men and God introduced another movement of his grace that found the glowing embers into a flame of fire at the reformation.

it happened in the 16th and 17th century revivals in this country when again the church had fallen upon sad times and the Lord intervened.

It happened in our own midst here as an island into the darkness of these islands last century when the gospel came in mighty power and the barrenness of the church was turned into life and vitality.

[19 : 49] it has happened this century again here and there. It is happening in many areas throughout the world tonight where the church of Jesus Christ is being renewed by the quickening spirit of God himself.

It can happen to you. It can happen to me. The problem with us often is this, that we may not be aware of our own spiritual barrenness, of our own desolations, of the absence of earnestness and enthusiasm for the things of God.

We may not be aware of the lack of spiritual life. We may not be aware of our own waywardness, of our own indifference, of our own sheer lackadaisical attitude to the things of God.

The church, without knowing it, can fall into these situations. And yet our hope is that into these situations the Lord can come.

And the Lord alone can effect a change that brings joy and singing and gladness into the life of an individual.

[21 : 12] How many of you here tonight would recognize that maybe above all else, the prayer that you need is revive us again, O Lord.

Remember us in thy mercy. Turn us again to thyself. Visit us in thy mercy. Turn thy feet to your desolations. This church said this at the psalmist in Psalm 18, as he viewed the church as it was then, compared it with a walled garden or a tree-lined garden.

It's broken down, he said. O Lord, come and repair it. Build it up again. Restore thy cause. Build up thy Jerusalem.

Well, my friend, you've got great encouragement as you pray that prayer, prayer, because you pray to the only one who can change the scene from darkness to light, from death to life, and from desolation to vitality and vigor.

Then third, we notice in these verses here, the extent of this change. the Lord speaks to the church, sing, break forth into joy, make preparation, enlarge the place of thy tent, stretch forth thy curtains, spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break out on the right hand and the left, thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

[22 : 55] Now, the Lord here uses, as he often does in the Bible, figurative language. He draws a picture for us, so that you and I can understand what he's saying.

And the picture is this, as you know in those days, it was the women who were usually connected with the work of the tent, or as we call it today, the work of the house.

They lived in tents. And here's a picture of a woman who's addressed, and the Lord says this to her, in her barrenness, in her desolation, in her loneliness, in her widowhood, living as it were in a small tent.

Get up, he says. Enlarge the place of your habitation. This place where your tent is pitched is going to become bigger.

So therefore, you've got to add to the curtains, to the cloth that makes up the tent. Add to it. Stretch it out. And because of that, he says, you've got to lengthen the cords that bind the tent to the pegs.

[24 : 00] And then you've got to strengthen the pegs so that they will take these cords. The place where you're going to dwell is going to become much larger. You are alone at the moment, but there are going to be many people with you.

And many, it is the place where you're going to become so extensive that you'll break forth to the right and to the left, to the north and to the south. You're going to inhabit, you're going to inherit the Gentiles, and the desolate cities are going to be inhabited.

Now that really is a picture that the Lord draws for us for the extension which is going to be in the experience of the church. and he speaks to the church, prepare for this, may spare no effort, make room for the increase, be obedient to my command, for the Lord has said it, thus saith the Lord.

And isn't it wonderful to think that this is God's purpose for his own church in the world, that the church of Jesus Christ is going to embrace the nations.

That there's a reference here to the ongoing missionary activity of the church of Jesus Christ. Penetrating through the world with the world of God.

[25 : 36] This is the instrument that God has placed in the hand of his own church. This is the weapon as Paul said to the church in Corinth, our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual.

The weapon of the word, the warrant of the word, the weapon of prayer, addressing her desire to the God who can bless the world.

And the church goes out tonight, different from militant Islam, different from all these organizations, faith, because it has in its possession one weapon, the word that God has given to her, and at her side, the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, constraining her to address her petitions to the Lord Most High, as he has sent her out with that word, which alone will win the victory over this unbelieving and this hostile world.

The great spiritual conquest of the nations, as someone has said it, this must be through the worldwide preaching of the gospel.

I think I'm right in saying that it was from this text, from this passage, that William Carey addressed the great gathering in Nottingham, at which he said, attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.

[27 : 14] I wonder how wide our vision is. I wonder how enthusiastic we are for the extension of the church of Jesus Christ.

Is this not our responsibility, no privilege, no duty, or is it true, my friend, that you have become so inward looking, that you can't see beyond your own horizons, beyond your own little patch, your own little tent, quite prepared to stay there, just on your own, as long as you have all the comforts that you want yourself spiritually.

how many of us are constrained to take these words on board? How many of us might even be afraid to look at them and to consider them, and to consider our responsibility to the worldwide function and mission of the Christian church?

Do your eyes ever stray from stone away? your heart, does your heart ever go out beyond the confines of your own home and your own congregation and your own denomination?

Do you think of the world, the nations of this world? Do you think of what you could do yourself to bring the gospel and insert truth to bear upon these nations?

[28 : 42] Oh, my friend, how closed our heart seems to be to anyone but ourselves. Remember the story?

Oh, I know I've told it often enough, but I love it, and that's why I love telling it. Remember the story of that missionary he returned home? The first night he was furloughed speaking to his mother in the kitchen, his widowed mother who didn't want him to go in the first place.

But she said to him on that first night, you know, he said, I didn't want you to go, but since you've gone, it seems as though the Lord has opened my heart to the whole world.

The Lord's heart is open to the world, and this is his promise to his church. Enlarge the place of thy habitation, stretch forth thy curtains, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes, for you're going to break out.

Break out! I often wonder, this is the problem with us, maybe in the Free Church of Scotland, and in some of our congregations. It's just that we're afraid to break out.

[29 : 50] Many other areas, not only in the world, but across the channel, but some congregation in our own land, this is the way they function, they build up, they build up, then they go out, they spread out.

We seem to be afraid to do it. It's just as long as we conserve and preserve what we have, we're doing well and in respects we are, and I think this has become a strategy, almost our goal.

Keep what you have. That's not the Lord's view, and that's not the Lord's mind either. Go out! Lengthen!

Extend! Embrace! The effects of this change. Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed, neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame, for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

Now, this is the effects of the change that the Lord is going to bring about. All these things, fear and shame and confusion, are replaced by contentment and joy and peace.

[31 : 13] They were exposed, as I said earlier, to shame and to reproach from within in Babylon. and they were exposed to fear and shame from without.

It arose from within themselves and their own community and it also came to them from without their community. And as I said, all this was what I brought by their own disobedience and by their own sins and they were embarrassed at the recollection of their own past.

She had brought upon herself a situation akin in natural terms to abandonment by her husband or even widowhood by death. But now here is a picture of a restored relationship, a changed situation. And though this overlaps as I said earlier, I just want to say to the passage we'll come into the final point here. Sin always separates and it brings shame and it brings disappointment and it brings reproach.

But grace restores so that a prodigal son can now speak of a father's love and of a father's mercy.

[32 : 30] Can speak of a God that takes up a wasted life and can give it meaning and purpose and direction.

Remember what sin had done but recalls with thankfulness the surpassing greatness of the grace of God that can overcome sin, that can wash away sin, that can restore a wasted life.

and give it purpose and meaning. So it is my friend that though there are people here tonight who remember with shame a godless and a fruitless and unfruitful past, yet tonight they recall with thankfulness the restoring the restoring pardoning mercy of God.

you can't forget the past. And there are times when people hang their head in shame as they recollect what they were, but they bless God for what he has done.

in many respects I think that this is a picture tonight of the church in heaven remembering her own sins. I know there's a lot of dispute amongst people as to whether sins are remembered in heaven.

[34 : 07] well I can't understand how the church can sing a song of praise unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins if she doesn't have a recollection of what he washed her from.

But it's not a recollection that fills her with shame. Yes there is shame associated with a recollection here, but shame will be no more there.

The memory will be sanctified. And forgiven sins will be remembered to the glory of a forgiving God unto whom the song is addressed to him who washed us from our sins in his own blood.

And finally and in a word the reason that is adduced here for all the changes that God effects for thy maker is thine husband. The Lord of hosts is his name.

thy redeemer is the holy one of Israel. The God of the whole earth shall he be called. How can God do all these things? Is it possible for him to come into my life and into our life as a people, as a congregation, as a church, as a nation?

[35 : 26] Is it possible for him to do it? Are our sins not too great? Is his shame not too deep seated? Is the reproach not too widespread? How can he come into that situation?

Because he said, thy maker is thine husband. The holy one of Israel is thy redeemer. The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

The Lord of hosts is his name. Why does he put it like that? Just to tell us one or two things. that this person who brings unites her to himself in this marriage bond is also her maker.

He is her husband and her creator. He is also the Lord of hosts, the redeemer, the holy one of Israel, and the Lord of the God of the whole earth.

You see, the husband unites her to himself also created her for himself. The Lord thy maker is thy husband. There are two things here that are brought before us.

[36 : 37] Paul takes up this train in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and he pictures God in his saving grace converting a sinner from a sin and changing the culture of his whole life.

As the God who at the very beginning entered into the world and said, let there be light. And there was light. And I take that Paul is saying there just this.

Lots of questions ask, how could there be light in the world before the sun and the moon were created? And sure, the point that Paul is making here is this, that the light that shone was the light of God himself.

That God, he said, who said, let there be light, and who shone into the darkness, has shined in your heart. the supernatural light of God taking up his abode in the heart of an individual, the supernatural light that was, and the supernatural light that now is, when he creates a new for himself, a saved soul.

The one who is your husband is your creator. creator. He has made you for himself, and he has united you to himself in the bonds of a spiritual marriage that can never be broken, that is indestructible and unchangeable, that death itself will not sever.

[38 : 09] He is your husband forever and ever, because he has made you. He is your creator. And he can do it, and he alone can do it.

And this is the encouragement tonight, for anyone who may be oppressed with a sense of sin, and a sense of shame, and a sense of barrenness, and a sense of desolation, and loneliness, and all that sin brings in its way into the life.

God can change all that. He can create anew, and unite you to himself. And he does it, also, we read here as the Lord of hosts.

You see, Babylon had hosts, a mighty army. Assyria had a mighty army. But he is a Lord of hosts. He is greater than them all, and he can overcome all difficulties, and all obstacles. the Redeemer, thy Redeemer, is the Holy One of Israel.

[39 : 20] He redeems, this is the meaning of redemption, it is at the cost, or at the price, of what? Of blood. They were redeemed, in the New Testament, through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

This is the price that was paid. More precious than any redemption money that ever exchanged hands. The blood of Jesus Christ, sufficient for the whole world.

Not only for you, but for the whole world. The Lamb of God, whose blood takeeth away the sin of the world. And that Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

The One who redeems at the cost and the price of His own blood, demands of you what He is Himself, the Holy One, the separate One.

Set Himself apart as the God of Israel. Expect you to set yourself apart for Him, the God of the whole earth, shall He be called.

[40 : 34] Here is a picture again of the sovereignty of God. There was Babylon, there was Assyria, both overcome by Persia.

In the course of time, Persia itself overthrown. The emergence of the Greek power, the emergence of the Roman power, the emergence in past centuries of powers which sought worldwide control

over the nations of all the earth.

The power of the church of Rome which was broken but which has now to a large and alarming extent repaired its power and is marching on and the Protestant world becomes indifferent to its claims.

The power of Nazi Germany, the power of communism, the power of Islam, many powers that work abroad, you seem to get the impression that they're permeating this world and spreading at the expense of the church of God.

But is it? Are they? From time to time you may think so. But the one who has a church in his hand is who? He is the God of the whole earth.

[42 : 09] You know the words of the child's hymn? He's got the whole wide world in his hand. And so he has. Directing all things and the affairs of all the nations of this world, you may think there are a haphazard, meaningless aspect to it all.

Yes, you may think that and I may think that, but that's not the way he sees it. Directing, controlling all things to that predetermined end.

What is the predetermined end? The extension, the expression of his own glory and the extension of his own church, from sea to sea, from the river to the sea, the whole earth will be filled with his glory because he is the God of the whole earth.

And as this chapter tells at the end, no weapon that is formed against him or against his church will prosper. He will prosper.

He will triumph. his church will triumph. Oh, my friend, the question is, do you belong to it? Are you in it?

[43 : 30] Are you caught up in this moment? Has he broken into you, desolation, into the barrenness of your life, into the loneliness of your existence as an individual?

Has he come with himself, with his light, with his power, with his peace, with his joy, with his grace? And with his glory, has he come? And if you say to me tonight, he hasn't, I say back to you, well, he can.

And this is a great encouragement of this passage. God can do for you and for the church of Christ in the world tonight, what he did for them.

In those far-off days, when things looked so unpromising. Don't despair. Here is a God who has power to do what no one else can.

Let us pray. bless us and help us to look to thyself. Turn our hearts to thee, O God, we pray thee.

[44 : 46] O mark not, as we sang here tonight, former sins against us, but for thy glory sake, come for our salvation and the praise be thine forever in Christ.

Amen. half to bring us