

## **Enlarge the Place of your Tent**

Isaiah 54:2

“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.”

The book of Isaiah teaches us that the Lord God Almighty is the Sovereign Ruler of history. If we look at the world from a human point of view, there seems to be no purpose or meaning in the world or in history. The world doesn't make sense. Evil prospers and good is trampled underfoot. With this kind of godless worldview we cannot but lose heart when the trials of life arise. We are tempted to buy into the devil's lie, thinking that we are victims of fate. But we must look at the world from the Biblical point of view. God is sovereign and God is good. God is love. When we know this and make a decision to listen to God's commands and believe his promises, we build our lives on a rock that nothing can shake. We know that we do not have to be prisoners of fate or of sin. As we begin this New Year we want to think about the great hope which the sovereign, almighty God has for his people. We want to claim God's promises and obey his commands and have his vision.

In Isaiah 40-55, Isaiah writes against the background of one of the most difficult times in Israel's history. The Babylonian captivity, which lasted 70 years, was Israel's darkest hour. Isaiah writes to plant God's hope in the hearts of captive people. He announces that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still the God of Israel. Furthermore, God has a purpose and a plan for his people, even though their situation seems hopeless. We are familiar with Isaiah 53. In this chapter Isaiah points to Jesus, the wonderful expression of God's love for sinful mankind. He bore our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

In chapter 54, Isaiah acknowledges the hopeless situation of God's people, but announces his amazing hope for them. Our God is a God of vision and hope. No human situation is beyond his redemptive power.

First, Israel was like a barren woman. Verse 1 begins, “Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child...” He compares Israel to a barren woman, a fruitless woman with no children, a woman who married young, but who was rejected and abandoned by her husband, a woman with a sorrowful past and no future. The Israelites had been unfaithful to God. He seemed to have abandoned them, sending them into captivity. But he had not. He said, “Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy...” He had not given up. He was waiting for them to repent and return to him. In spite of their situation as burned out refugees, God had vision and hope for them. He challenged them to sing for joy, to enlarge the place for their tent, to reach out to draw the whole world into the tent of God. When the promises of God come into your hearts, hope takes root. Fear, despair, grudges

and bitterness go out. Last Summer the Inter-Africa Summer Bible Conference was held in Nigeria. In some ways, Africa is like the destitute and barren woman. But God helped us to see that he has hope for Africa. There are faithful and sacrificial missionaries whom he sent there. There are growing African shepherds, who are learning God's heart for the African people. There are new house churches being established. In a land where immorality is rampant and AIDS is eating up so many people, there are men and women who are faithful to God and faithful to each other. There are Christ-centered families committed to obey God's word and do his work. There is hope for Africa.

Israel had become sorrowful and desolate and fatalistic because of her sins. They had failed to maintain God's blessing. They were Abraham's descendants and possessors of God's promise. God called them from among all the people of the world to be his own possession. He gave them the law and trained them in the desert. Then he planted them in the promised land, the land glowing with milk and honey. He wanted them to prosper and be happy. But he also had a glorious mission and purpose for them. He wanted them to raise them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). However, they ignore their mission. Rather, they were influenced by the godless materialism and the blatant immorality of the people of the land. They became just like the Canaanites. So God disciplined them. He sent them into exile to Babylon. The Babylonian army ravaged the beautiful city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple of God. They took the people away as captives and slaves and kept them as prisoners in Babylon for 70 years. The Israelites learned that living under the gracious and righteous rule of God is far better than living under the oppressive rule of men but it seemed to be too late. They had failed. When they returned, they were sorrowful and bitter. They felt cursed and abandoned, useless and fruitless and without hope.

Second, "Sing and shout for joy." God spoke his word to the hopeless people of Israel. Read verse 1a. "Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy..." What an uncomfortable encouragement to a fatalistic, sorrowful woman! How could the people of Israel burst into song and shout for joy when their lives were so desolate and fruitless and they seemed to have no meaning or purpose? Read verse 1b. "...because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." The sorrowful woman Israel could rejoice because God had hope for her and he gave her his word of promise. He promised the fruitless, desolate woman that she would be fruitful. He promised to take away Israel's sorrow and give them his blessing. God's promises give us hope. When Abraham was feeling sorry for himself because he had no son, God told him to look at the stars and try to count them. His descendants would be more than these. Abraham believed God's promise and it changed his life.

We who have God's word and his promise can also rejoice. There is a way back to God; there is a way back to a meaningful and fruitful life. Jesus is God's promised Messiah. He promised that the truth will set us free we are free. He promised that when the Son sets us free we are free indeed. He sets us free when we hold to his word and become his disciples (Jn 8:31-32,36). When we repent, he forgives and

wipes away our sins. He gives us the refreshing of the Holy Spirit, eternal life and the kingdom of God. This is his promise. God sent Jesus to fulfil God's promises.

Many of us know what it is to suffer because of sin. Some have pursued human freedom until they became slaves of sin. Some are from broken homes and suffer because of the sins of their parents. Some are the victims of an oppressive society. I read the story of Stephen Lungu of Zimbabwe and Malawi. When he was 8 years old, he was abandoned by his violent father. Then, at 10, he was abandoned by his alcoholic mother. He became homeless. He survived by raiding rich white people's garbage cans. He became the leader of a band of vandals, homeless boys like himself, called the "Black Shadows." They became communists and devoted themselves to disrupting society by acts of terror. They especially hated Christians. It seemed that for him there was no way out of the chains of hatred, ignorance and violence. Stephen Lungu went with his gang to an evangelistic meeting with the plan to throw petrol bombs and kill everyone at the meeting. Instead, there he met Jesus and found real love, real freedom and real revolution. In Jesus there is hope for every person.

Third, "Enlarge the place of your tent" (2,3). God had a surprising command for these desolate people. He did not sympathize with them. He said in verses 2 and 3: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess the nations and settle in their desolate cities." What an amazing command and impossible promise! What does it mean to "Enlarge the place of your tent?" "Enlarge the place of your tent" means widen your heart. God does not want his people to sit around feeling sorry for themselves. He does not want them to be selfish. Jesus summed up God's command by saying, "Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt22:37-39). God's people cannot be self-centered or even family-centered. We must open our hearts to the people around us who need Jesus. Jesus calls us to put Jesus first, others next and yourself last. He calls us to love our neighbors, our brothers, and even our enemies. Even if we have many personal problems, we cannot ignore God's calling. I cannot think, "I will serve God and others after making money or after graduating or after getting married or if God allows me to go to some better country. "Each of us must hear God's command from where we are right now, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide."

„Enlarge the place of your tent“ means to have God's vision. A barren woman has no need for a bigger tent. But God says, "Enlarge the place of your tent. He is telling his sorrowful people to have God's vision. Many years later Jesus told his fearful, unbelieving disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (Mk 16:15). He wanted them to see the world and other people from God's point of view. He wanted them to have God's vision. God's vision is rooted in his love. For God so loved the world he sent his Son. He sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. When we know him, God's vision comes to our hearts.

In the late 1700's a shoemaker in Scotland accepted Isaiah 54:2, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back." He put a map of China on the wall of his room and began to pray for the unreached multitudes there. God did not send him to China. But God did send him to India. His name was William Carey. He had many problems, including a wife who was a mental patient. But he had God's vision; he obeyed Jesus' command and went—with his family—and God used him greatly to plant the gospel in India, and to plant missionary vision in the students of Cambridge University. A great missionary movement began that eventually covered the world. How can we have this vision? "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back."

Fourth, "lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." If one makes the place of his tent larger, he must have longer tent ropes and he must hammer the tent stakes deeper into the ground. We have longer tent ropes when we pray. Our prayer reaches as high as the heavens, to our Father God and our prayer reaches to the far places of the earth. We strengthen our stakes when we study the Bible. We must pit down deep roots in the word of God by daily Bible reading and study. We cannot do God's work with human zeal. Even if we catch a glimpse of God's vision for the world, we cannot do anything unless we learn to depend on God in prayer and learn to listen to and obey his word. When we seek to obey Jesus' world mission command, God blesses us. One young man saw that the young students in Korea, who should have been full of spirit and hope for the future, were only full of fatalism and a dependent spirit; they saw themselves as frogs sitting in the bottom of a well, looking up at the sky. So he taught them the Bible and planted world mission vision in their hearts. God worked mightily and made Korea a blessed country, and a country that is sending so many missionaries with the life-giving gospel to every part of the world.

Fifth, God's promise. Verse 3 says, "For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess the nations and settle in their desolate cities." This reminds us of God's promise to Abraham, "Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Ge 22:17-18). We are praying that God may open the doors of the Muslim world to the gospel. We are praying that God may have mercy on the people of North Korea and bring the gospel of love and peace to their hearts and allow them the freedom to worship God. We must believe God's promises and share God's hope. The motto of the Student Volunteer Movement was "the evangelization of the world in this generation." God has hope to evangelize the whole world through his people in every generation, too. "Your descendants will dispossess the nations and settle in their desolate cities." This is his great, long-term plan, which he is working out on the stage of human history. He will finish when Jesus comes again.

Sixth, God's love. Then, how can we have hope for ourselves and our world when the problems seem so insurmountable? Read verse 5. "For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth." God, the Lord of all the earth can make the barren woman fruitful. He is the source of life. In him is life and his life is the light of men (Jn 1:4). When Jesus met a broken, despised, hopeless, love-thirsty Samaritan woman, he gave

her the water of eternal life. He could do this because he is the Christ, the Holy One of Israel, our Redeemer and the Lord of all the earth. He became her true husband, the source of her forgiveness, her new life, her love. It is this Jesus whom we must meet and worship and to whom we must commit our lives. This Summer, July 29-August 1 we are having the MSU International Summer Bible Conference. May we come together to pray and study the Bible and catch God's vision for his world. May we have Jesus' prayer in our hearts. "Your Kingdom come, your will be done." May we enlarge the place of our tent.