

Good News Unrestrained
Isaiah 54:1-5 April 6-7, 2019

Introduction

- Willem grew up in the Netherlands in the 1850s and 60s. His father was a Dutch Reformed minister, so he was raised hearing the good news about Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Eventually, the hope and peace of the gospel overtook Willem and he sought to become a minister like his father.
- However, school wasn't Willem's strong suit and he quickly failed out of seminary. Undeterred, Willem travelled to Belgium where he became a missionary to a small town of coal miners. His efforts were not very fruitful until there was a mine disaster and Willem worked tirelessly to care for the injured. From that point on, Willem began to see fruit as he ministered amongst the people. Apart from his love of God, he also had a love of art, and would draw pictures of the people and Belgian landscapes in his free moments.
- As word of Willem's ministry spread, leaders from the surrounding churches came and visited him. They were shocked at how poorly he dressed and at his generally unkempt appearance. They heavily criticized his speaking ability, and ultimately, despite the support of the townspeople, had him dismissed from his post.
- Distraught at the loss of his ministry position and the graceless criticism of the visiting church leaders, Willem's faith waivered as he sought solace in his art, beginning to paint for the first time at the age of 30. The letters he wrote to his brother tell us that he continued to seek Jesus even as he struggled with alcoholism, mental illness, and the temptations of the world that seemed to press in against him. Willem struggled with a gospel message that focused on salvation of the lost but didn't speak to what God could do beyond salvation in one's own life and in the lives of those around them.
- The past couple weeks we've been studying the book of Isaiah, where we're seen God outline His good news well in advance of Jesus Christ. **Isaiah 52** set the stage as we looked at the beauty of the Good News Proclaimed; that God has a plan for the brokenness and sin throughout this world. Then last week we looked at **Isaiah 53** and the Good News Foreordained as we saw a clear picture of who the promised redeemer of the world would be. That chapter painted a graphic prophetic picture that was fulfilled in every way over 700 years later by Jesus Christ. We saw that the perfect life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was an acceptable offering for the sins of the world and accomplished exactly what was foretold by **Isaiah 53**.
- Today, we turn our attention to **Isaiah 54** and we get to be encouraged by the amazing power of the Good News Unrestrained **PP**. We're going to look at the first 5 verses of this chapter in three parts: Unrestrained Celebration, Unrestrained Participation, and Unrestrained Transformation.
- So as you turn to **Isaiah 54**, I'm going to pray,

- Before we read, let me again remind us of the context. Isaiah is writing prophetically about what God is going to do for His people. He has warned them that they would be punished for their idolatry, but in the last couple chapters God has given them hope that He will send them a redeemer, a savior to finally deliver them from the bondages of sin once and for all.
- Now, in **chapter 54**, Isaiah begins to prophetically address the people of God to tell them how the proclamation of the preceding chapters should change their lives as they allow the good news to move unrestrained through their hearts and minds.
 - And when I say the people of God, naturally this applied first to the Jewish people. But as with many prophecies, there are layers here. So this exhortive prophecy in chapter 54 not only applied to the Jewish people, but it also applies to those of us today who have submitted to Jesus Christ as our redeemer.
- So I want us to see that **Isaiah 54** is all about how the people of God are to respond to what God the Father has done for us through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Unrestrained Celebration (v1)**
- And the first thing we're told is that the Unrestrained Gospel **PP** should produce celebration within us. **Isaiah 54:1a**
 - "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
 - break forth into singing and cry aloud,
 - you who have not been in labor!
- Right off the bat we see 3 commands to the people of God: **PP**
 - "Sing" (Heb. *Ranan*) – to be overcome with joy so as to shout aloud
 - "Break Forth" (Heb. *Patsach*) – to break apart like a roaring river breaking through a dam, unable to hold the water back.
 - "cry aloud" (Heb. *Tsahal*) – cheerfully shout out
- I don't think I need to elaborate on this on too much. As men and women who've been saved by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – people who can look forward to being with Him forever as He reigns – we should be the most joyful, excited, and pleasant people on this planet.
 - Scripture says **PP** in **Colossians 3:16-17** "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."
 - And **PP** **Ephesians 5:18-20** "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving

thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

- You see the more we're filled with the Word of God and the more we're walking by the Spirit of God, the more deeply we should understand our amazing God and know the gravity of what He's done for us. The only appropriate response to that is to be filled with thanksgiving and praise to the point that we should be overflowing with song for Him!
 - I don't know about you, but I don't have the greatest voice. And when I was younger, I was self-conscious of that and would barely sing any of the songs at church. But I praise God that He has killed my self-conscious pride in that area and taught me to lift my voice in song to Him and to have no inhibition about lifting my hands in praise when He moves me to do so.
 - If it's difficult for you to sing praises to our God, ask Him to help you get out of the way of His worship. **PP** Singing songs of praise isn't about how good you sound, it's about worshipping our King. Recognize your pride if it's there, confess it, and ask the Lord to stamp it out so that your tongue would be loosed to praise Him.
 - We're commanded to sing here, so let go of your pride and lift your voice to our God. Amen.
- Christian, we should be overflowing in song-filled worship of our savior. As the truth of the gospel roots in our hearts, and its unrestrained power is set forth we should break out in thankful celebration.

Unrestrained Participation (v2-3)

- But there shouldn't only be Unrestrained Celebration, there should also be Unrestrained Participation. **PP** Let's continue reading **Isaiah 54:1b-3**
 - For the children of the desolate one will be more
 - than the children of her who is married," says the Lord.
 - **2 PP**
 - "Enlarge the place of your tent,
 - and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
 - do not hold back; lengthen your cords
 - and strengthen your stakes.
 - **3 PP**
 - For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
 - and your offspring will possess the nations
 - and will people the desolate cities.
- I'm not going to break down each of these stanzas, but the main thing that I want us to see is that the Lord is telling us the more we walk in the good news of Jesus Christ, the

more He's going to give us opportunity to participate in the work of spreading the Gospel to the nations.

- In **Genesis 12:1-3**, God made a covenant with Abraham whereby He promised that all the Earth would receive blessing through Abraham's lineage. God's plan was always to use His chosen people to be a blessing to the nations. **PP** As God blessed them, they should overflow with that blessing to others.
- But the reality is that the Jewish people as a whole didn't take their call to be a light to the nations very seriously. Praise God that He fulfilled His promise to Abraham through Jesus Christ, as Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and certainly the greatest blessing to all who would receive Him.
 - But the job of spreading the gospel to all the nations has been moved from the Jewish people and has now been given to God's chosen people who have been grafted in through faith (see **Romans 11**).
 - Jesus's final words to His followers in **Matthew 28:19-20 PP** "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- We have the great privilege and responsibility to be the hands, mouth, and feet of Jesus Christ as we serve those around us, and tell them the powerful truth of what Jesus Christ has done for us and for what He has done for them, if they would receive Him by faith and submit to Him as master of their lives.
- In fact, **Isaiah 54** makes clear that we should expect the Lord to do amazing things as we obediently share the gospel with others. These verses tell us to metaphorically enlarge our tents as we prepare to have more spiritual children than we can imagine.
 - In the 1790s, **PP** William Carey, a shoe-maker and part-time preacher in England, used this passage to exhort his hearers to boldly go wherever the Lord was sending them in order to spread the gospel. His sermon, which was repeated all throughout England, started a movement that resulted in hundreds of missionaries being sent all around the world.
 - The motto of this missionary movement was "Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God".
 - Now, the Lord may be calling you to go somewhere overseas, but more than likely he's simply calling you to boldly proclaim the good news to those around you here: your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and maybe even sometimes random strangers you come across.
- The point is that God *commands* us to enlarge our tents here in **Isaiah 54**, it's not an option. It's an imperative to lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes. **PP** This metaphor of preparing for an increase is a command to us, and the way we carry that out,

to borrow the motto from William Carey, is to expect great things from God and boldly attempt great things *for* God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Have you ever invited someone to your small group to talk about spiritual things? Have you ever invited a wandering soul to come hear truth and worship the King of Kings at one of our worship services? Have you ever boldly shared your testimony when the opportunity arose? Resurrection Sunday is just around the corner, have you invited anyone to come out and worship with us?
- Christian, let me just gently remind us that if we're not sharing our faith with others, we're not carrying out the command of our King. The good news is not just for our individual benefit; we can't submit to Jesus and receive His sacrifice and think there's nothing else to do. We have an invitation to participate in the work of the gospel right where we're planted, and as the good news is unleashed more and more in our hearts and minds the result of that should be a bold sharing of the truth with those around us.
 - So ask the Lord to help you step out of your comfort zone and walk in the power of His Spirit to share your faith story, to invite others to worship with you, or even just to seek to build a relationship with a non-believer so you can eventually have the opportunity to share the gospel.
- The good news unrestrained in our lives should produce outward kingdom fruit as we participate in the work we're invited to. But as we read the last few verses of this section, we also see that the good news unrestrained in our lives will produce inward kingdom fruit as we see unrestrained transformation in our hearts and minds through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Unrestrained Transformation (v4-5)

- **Isaiah 54:4-5 PP**
 - "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
 - be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;
 - for you will forget the shame of your youth,
 - and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.
 - **5 PP**
 - For your Maker is your husband,
 - the Lord of hosts is his name;
 - and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
 - the God of the whole earth he is called."
- Again, the first thing I want us to see are the imperative commands we're given here: "fear not" and "be not confounded"
 - "Fear not", I think, is pretty self-explanatory. "Be not confounded" **PP** (Heb. *Kalam*) is a command to not be ashamed, dishonored, or humiliated.

- You see the metaphors used in this passage of barrenness, divorce, and widowhood in the honor-shame culture of the ANE were the worst things that could happen to a woman. And here, the Lord is saying that even though we all once were barren and widowed bearing no fruit in our lives, even though we've been disgraced, there is nothing to fear.
 - We cannot be overcome by the shame of our past; as the good news of Jesus Christ sinks into our hearts and minds it transforms those fears into trust in our King and removes those old shames as we're given a new identity as members of the family of God.
- But the enemy of our souls is going to do everything he can to get us to keep our eyes on our past, cowering in fear and shame; telling us that we're the same barren people we've always been. Yet, the unrestrained good news pushes aside those lies and proclaims that in Christ we're new creations (**2 Cor. 5:17**), the old has passed away and we've been given brand new identities in Jesus.
 - The unrestrained good news should bring us to constant celebration as we're filled with thanksgiving for who our God is and what He's done, it should move us to bold participation in the work He invites us to as we expect God to do great things around us, and it should work an ongoing transformation in us as we learn to walk in the grace of our God so that we can more fully trust in Him and walk confidently in our new identities regardless of what may have happened in our past.
- The lord **PP** will produce all of this fruit in our lives, as we press into the unrestrained power of the Gospel.
 - **Jeremiah 17:7-8** ""Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Closing

- And this brings us back to Willem, **PP** the struggling painter trying to make sense of his shattered, barren faith. As Willem continued to struggle through his Christian experience, he began to find an outlet for his faith in his painting. He never achieved any degree of notoriety while he was alive, but would often choose subject matter that subtly spoke of his pursuit of Jesus.
- You see, while he was turned off and rejected by a gospel message that focused on outward appearances and just trying to get people to believe, he was drawn back to Christ through the power of the gospel to transform us from the inside out.
- Thus, he often painted **PP** images of new life emerging from wheat fields or blossoms that spoke to the power of the gospel to change us from the inside out. He also painted the portraits of struggling men and women overwhelmed by the difficulties of this life and in

need of so much more than a mere surface level makeover. And as his confidence in the good news of Jesus Christ returned, his works took on more vivid colors.

- Before his tragic death at 37 years old, Willem wrote to his friend of his faith in Jesus, PP “Christ alone...has affirmed eternal life as the most important certainty....He [Jesus] lived serenely, as an artist greater than all other artists, scorning marble and clay and paint, [instead] working in the living flesh....In other words, this peerless artist, scarcely conceivable with the blunt instrument of our modern, nervous, and obtuse brains, made neither statues nor painting nor books.... [Rather], he made living men, immortals.”
- Even though he struggled with many things, Willem desired that through his art, people would see the transformational light of Christ shining in the darkness of this world to bring life to this broken world. And the most famous painting of Vincent Willem van Gogh, “The Starry Night”, PP clearly depicts the power of the light of the unrestrained good news shining in the darkness.
 - A light that not only saves someone but will also move in their inner lives to produce the fruit of joy, boldness, and maturity as the gospel leads them to celebration, participation, and transformation.
- Let’s go from here seeking to have the Holy Spirit use the canvases of our lives to paint beautiful pictures of God’s power to produce joy and thankfulness in our lives, to boldly and passionately pursue the opportunities to share His truth and love with those around us, and constantly seek to be refined and transformed by Him to be more like Jesus as we walk in our identities as Children of God.
- By the grace of God, PP let us walk as beautiful works of art being crafted and molded by the master artist to put on display the glory and majesty of the unrestrained good news of our King for all to see. Amen. Amen.