

ISAIAH 54 YOUR HERITAGE!

What is your heritage? Are you German, Norwegian, Irish, or of Native American ancestry? Do you still know a few words in the “Muttersprache”—German for “mother tongue”? Did your grandparents or great grandparents homestead nearby? Is the land still in your family? It's all part of your heritage—what you have received from those before you. U.S. citizens also have a great heritage—freedoms, opportunities, prosperity. Heritage is something we wish to pass on to children and grandchildren—a gift to them as it was to us!

The text for today is talking about the great and honored heritage of the children of God—that is, the members of the Invisible Holy Christian Church. This heritage is a precious gift—forgiveness and life forever in heaven! It is a heritage we want for all our generations to come. Isaiah describes this heritage in terms of God's blessings upon the Nation of Judah (all that was left of the Children of Israel) as He restored them to their homeland. Earlier the people of Judah had been stripped of their heritage, as a soldier stripped of his stripes. The Lord in anger over Judah's waywardness and idol worship had brought upon them defeat, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and even captivity in Babylon—OUT! But now Isaiah shares good news, that the Lord in His mercy would restore the people to their heritage in an amazing and glorious fashion.

¹Sing, 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. ²Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings. Do not spare. Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. ³For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.

Isaiah addresses the captive people of Judah and Jerusalem as women who long for children and weep for children, but have none. These are women who have never married, or have married but do not conceive children, or widows who have been left desolate and childless by a husband's death. A sorrowful state. But Isaiah says, “Sing! Sing aloud! Shout for joy! (we might put it, ‘O what a beautiful morning! O what a beautiful day!’); for things are about to change!!” The despondent, childless woman will have MORE children than the mother! She needs to make her tent bigger—more fabric, longer ropes, stronger stakes! “Your family will grow to the right and to the left. Your family will possess the other nations, and fill the empty, deserted cities. O people of God, though you are now nothing, you will rise again to a great and mighty people richly blessed by the Lord!”

This promised heritage never came true in Old Testament times, nor in the New. Men have attempted to set up a “church-city” or a “church-state”—a perfect society—but have always failed. Even election-year candidates talk about leading America to be the nation we all want it to be. It's a rosy picture, but wash your glasses. Isaiah was not speaking of any earthly community, but of the great glory for God's people in His spiritual kingdom! The believers enjoy its peace and comfort in a limited way now, but will fully receive it in heaven forever! A better day, God's day, is coming! Your heritage in Christ awaits!

⁴Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. ⁵For your Maker is your husband; the LORD of hosts is His name. And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He is called the God of the whole earth. ⁶For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused, says your God.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem feared they would labor under their captivity and shame ever after, for their God had abandoned them—a bunch of losers. True enough. And it was their own fault. They had turned away from the Lord like a bold and impudent young woman brazenly saying to Him, “Make me follow you.” In His due time the Lord replied, THAT'S ENOUGH! He sent Judah away into widowhood. Yet now Isaiah brings the message that their heritage would not be utterly lost. Because of the Lord's mercy, the shame of their youth and the abandonment of their widowhood would be forgotten. The Lord, the Almighty Creator of the “hosts”—“multitudes” of every kind—the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, their rescuing Redeemer would pay the ransom-price for them. He would be their husband! Imagine! A run-away and then a cast-away wife being taken back to the love, forgiveness, and security of being married to the Lord! He is the God of all mercy and comfort!

It is no different for you. Your heritage is not built on you yourself—not with all your transgressions!—but on the tender heart and mercy of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who rescues. Your foolish sins of the past are put behind, even those sins into which you have gotten yourself (did ever hear “You asked for it?”). They are erased in Jesus. You have a glorious heritage!

7 For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer. 9 For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. 10 For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

The Lord is very straightforward about what has taken place. Agitated by their sins, He had indeed turned His face from them and had forsaken them—for a moment. It was not the Lord's fault that they had been exiled to Babylon. Children like to pass the blame to someone else. Adults even like to find fault with the one who corrects them. "Sure I was driving twenty over the limit, but why don't you go catch some real criminals like drug dealers or identity thieves." The Lord's actions were the same as the parent who re-acts with displeasure when junior or missy break the rules—sending them to their room. But when the sobbing finally stops, and the child says, I'm sorry, Dad/Mom; does not Dad or Mom gather them up into their arms of love and forgiveness? The Lord did so with the people of Judah. For a little while He turned His wrath upon them to teach them, but when they got the point, *With great mercies I will gather you; with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you; says the LORD, your Redeemer.* For a short time God's anger was meted out to lead His children to repentance; He did not command the waters of the Flood at Noah's time to stay on the earth forever. Mountains will pass away, but His kindness, mercy, and forgiveness in Jesus never will. When you have sinned, in your shame humbly go to Him in Jesus' name for peace. Forget the pride and the "I-can't-forgive-myself-for-what-I've-done" business. Are you bigger than God? In Jesus who died and rose for you, God has forgiveness also for you. You have a great heritage in Christ!

11 O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. 12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones.

The Lord describes the restoration of His outcast people—tossed about by a tempest—in terms of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem with gorgeous gems, sapphire, rubies, crystal, precious stones! He will spare no cost to honor His re-instated people—like the father welcoming back his prodigal son in Jesus' parable. You have the same glorious heritage. In the book of Revelation heaven is described in similar symbolic terms: *19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysopraxe, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. (Revelation 21:19-21)* Conary to the shame we deserve, we are given a glorious gift! What a heritage!

13 All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children. 14 In righteousness you shall be established. You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear, and [far] from terror, for it shall not come near you. 15 Indeed they [the enemies] shall surely assemble, but not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake. 16 Behold, I have created the blacksmith who blows the coals in the fire, who brings forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the spoiler to destroy. 17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn.

The future is safe in Christ, for all God's people. God thwarts every enemy and attack—with weapons of iron or words of tongue. The lies of Satan and others will carry no weight. Your children shall share in the heavenly heritage of peace and righteousness before God through Jesus.

This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me, says the LORD.

This is your heritage, the gift of righteousness from God. Just as your heritage in the U.S. has cost the labors and the lives of many who went to fight (we think of Veterans tomorrow), your heritage in the Lord cost something greater. In Isaiah 53 directly before this Chapter 54 text we read, *Surely He [Christ] has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (4-6).*

Treasure your great heritage—God's open arms in heaven through Christ!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---