

ISAIAH 54 WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT SIN'S CONSEQUENCES?

In the previous chapters, we have heard the Jewish exiles summoned to leave Babylon; and we have beheld the Divine Servant becoming the Sin-bearer for them and for all His people. And now, our attention is startlingly recalled to the desolate city of Jerusalem. “Barren,” “forsaken,” and “desolate” – such are the terms which are applied to her by the One Who cannot err (verse 1). But how is this? Have we not learned that the Mediator has put away sin at the cost of His own blood? How, then, does this city lie like an open sore on the face of the earth? Cannot God’s forgiveness, which has triumphed over sin, also triumph over the wreck and ruin that sin has caused? Is that redemption complete which fails to grapple with all the results and consequences of wrong-doing? This question opens up a great subject, and one that touches us all. We are conscious that although our sin is forgiven, yet certain consequences remain – of which the ruined city of Jerusalem is a picture. We cannot undo the past, and God Himself cannot undo it. It can never be as though it had never been. The 70 years of captivity, the shame, the sorrow, the anguish, and the forfeited opportunities – yes, the Lord can and does forgive, but these things cannot be altered now. When we sin against God, two consequences accrue. Our sin cries against us, as Abel’s blood did against Cain; its voice goes up to high heaven, and it can only be stilled and hushed by the pleading of the blood of Jesus. His blood gives us peace and rest and deliverance from the guilt and the penalty that would otherwise be laid to our charge. But even when this has been effected and we are forgiven, there are sometimes other results that still have to be faced. We are certainly forgiven, but we cannot always get back what we have lost or squandered. One example from Scripture may help to illustrate this. When, in response to Nathan’s parable, David broke the long silence and cried, “I have sinned!” – the prophet immediately answered, “The Lord hath put away thy sin.” But he also added, “The sword shall never depart out of thy house.” As far as the sin lay between God and David’s soul, it was removed immediately upon his confession; but as far as the natural consequences were concerned, they followed him for many a long year. In the same way, even though we can recall the assurance of the 40th chapter that Jerusalem’s iniquity had been pardoned, the allusions of this chapter refer to its desolate ruins. It is clear, then, that we may – through repentance and faith – obtain the perfect pardon of our Savior; and yet there may be scars or lost years, of which this ruined city was such a significant picture. It is an absolute truth that one look of confession and faith will restore us to the Lord’s favor; but it is also true that what a man sows, he must also reap.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Despite small beginnings, Christ’s Church will be greatly enlarged – verses 1-5*
- ❖ *God promises to return to her in mercy, and never again withdraw – verses 6-10*
- ❖ *She is promised honor, peace, and security from her enemies – verses 11-17*

Here are a few words of help to anyone who may be suffering from the results of past wrong-doing. It is true that the past cannot be altered; but it is a comfort to know that it can be forgiven, and that the soul can be made white and clean. This great blessing should not be lost from our view amidst the outbursts



of infinite regret. It is also important to remember that there is a world of difference between *punishment* and *chastisement*. The first was for the Savior, Who endured the guilt and penalty for our sins upon the cross; the latter alone is for us who are united with Him by living faith. As our Father, the Lord only chastens us for our profit, using the natural consequences of our sin as His rod. But let us also continue to believe in Christ's inalienable love. He is still the Husband of our souls (verse 5), and He cannot put us away from Him. The kindness with which He has had mercy upon us is everlasting. He has even sworn that the waters of death and destruction shall not forever separate us from Him; He has entered into a covenant of peace with us, which shall outlast the mountains and the hills. We may grow apathetic and careless, and bring to ourselves pain and woe; we may grieve and dishonor Him, and strive against the development of His purposes. But He cannot cease to love us! His tender pity will still embrace us – grieving to see our self-inflicted sorrows; but using them as a furnace to generate heat which will consume our bonds, although it shall leave our skin unscorched and the hairs of our head unsinged. Thus, even through our very wanderings, He accomplishes the loftiest purposes for our purity and our holiness. Such love is too wonderful for us! We cannot understand it, but we will lie down and rest in its everlasting arms.

In the second part of the chapter (verses 11-17), reference is still being made to Jerusalem. Earlier in the chapter, she was addressed as a forsaken wife; but here she is seen as destined to arise from her ruins, and to become the joy of the whole earth! Of course, the primary reference is to that actual rebuilding of the city, which took place under the direction of Nehemiah. But there is also a further spiritual meaning! These words must refer to that city of God, which is always arising amidst the ruins of all other structures – being watched by the ever-attentive eye of the Great Architect, being built by unseen hands, being tested by the constant application of the measuring-line of truth and the plumbline of righteousness, and emerging slowly from heaps of rubbish into strength and beauty! A description is here given of the pricelessness of the structure of this city, the privileges of her inhabitants, and the safety which is assured to her by the Word of God. And let us not hesitate to apply this blessed vision to ourselves. It is clearly put within our reach by the assurance with which the chapter closes – namely, that this is the heritage of all the servants of the Lord!

Lord, we confess that our sins have caused the ruin that has come upon us, but we thank You that You still gather us into Your arms with great mercies! Amen.