

☛ God's Word to OBC

Isaiah 54:1-4

"Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the Lord. **2** "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. **3** For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. **4** "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated."

This is an important text for Boone Open Bible Church. It all started back in 2003. Several days in a row I awoke at 5:49 without an alarm clock. I thought that was unusual as my normal waking time was 7 or 7:30. I prayed about it and felt that 549 was a bible verse God wanted me to find. I searched and found that there is only one place 549 could be.

Many bible books have 5 chapters but none of them have 49 verses in the 5th chapter. Matthew 5 has 48, which is close, but doesn't match the 5:49 on my clock. Only Psalms and Isaiah have at least 54 chapters. All other bible books have less than 54. But Psalm 54 has only 7 verses. So, after thoroughly searching, I found the only place this 549 could be in the bible is Isaiah 54:9. And when I finally realized that, to top it all off, I noticed that the page heading in the bible I was using at the time said Isaiah 54:9!

I ended up studying the entire chapter and felt that much of it was speaking to me on a personal level and left it at that. But Isaiah 54 kept popping back up over the next couple of years. In early 2005, two years later, I was on a prayerwalk at the Ledges. I was asking God to speak to me and Isaiah 54 came to mind, so I read the chapter again. I felt God was saying that this chapter is for Open Bible Church of Boone. He's revealing his heart and desire for us. These key thoughts stood out to me:

Verses 2 & 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..."

We should increase our vision and embrace the idea that God has big plans for us. This sentiment has been felt by several of our long-term church members... that there is something special about BOBC and God has important plans for us. We've even had guest ministers comment that they believed God has a special anointing and calling on this church.

Verse 4 – "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame..."

We should continue moving forward with confidence. At the time, the building addition was predominantly on my mind, so it seemed like a confirmation from God to go ahead

with that. This was a confidence builder for me, but I hadn't shared it with anyone else up to this point.

Then just a couple of weeks after that prayerwalk, we were closing the Sunday church service with an extended time of prayer and worship, when Doris Vansickle spoke. Without giving a reference she quoted from Isaiah 54. I could hardly believe it! God was highlighting this text yet again.

You know, when God says something multiple times, he really wants you to pay attention to it... So then, I started to understand that God intended for me to look at the whole chapter from the beginning. It wasn't specifically Isaiah 54:9, but that verse was necessary to get me into Isaiah 54. It was becoming obvious that God was using Isaiah 54 as a prophetic word for BOBC. But that's not all...

At our Open House in February 2008, to dedicate the new addition, Mike Lumbard shared a few thoughts before he prayed over us. He said that God had given him Isaiah 54:2-4 for this event, but he wondered why since it seems to be projecting future expansion while we had just finished an expansion. His conclusion was that it was to confirm what God had already spoken to us and that it was referring to a spiritual expansion within our hearts.

Now, we've finally paid off the mortgage for the building addition and I'm reminded of Isaiah 54 yet again. I believe God is still prophesying to BOBC...

Verse 1... More are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband...

Verse 3... You will spread out to the right and to the left...

☞ **Gather the Harvest**

In the context, this is talking about expanding God's kingdom. God wants us to **increase** our numbers by **adding new believers**.

In fact, a few years ago, we were seeing a trend here at OBC and were feeling a bit like the barren woman. Our congregation was aging. There were very few young families and our nursery was predominantly empty. So, we began praying. We knew we couldn't keep on getting older and we needed some younger ones to rise up. That trend was one of the reasons we brought Jacob and Christina on board. We wanted a strong representation of young leadership in our church. And after they started on staff, we made it our practice for over a year at every staff meeting to pray that God would bring us young couples and families. God has been answering that prayer.

I believe God is still promising increase. He wants us to partner with him to grow. His mission is described in Luke 19:10... "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." That is now our mission as well...

☞ We know that there are **around 8000** just in the City of Boone who aren't attending church anywhere. And probably more that may attend church, but don't really know the Lord. We've got a plentiful harvest waiting for us right here in our home town! Reaching them with the Gospel is one of the reasons we exist as a church...

☞ Matthew 28:19-20 **Influence others for Christ**

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Here in Isaiah, God says, "Don't be afraid, you won't be ashamed or humiliated." So, ☞ share the Gospel. Pray for your family, friends and neighbors. **Invite them** to church. (**business card*) They need the Lord.

Psalms 145:13 says, "the Lord is faithful to all his promises." But he wants to partner with us to achieve those goals. So, let's gather the harvest!

☞ **Grow your Heart**

Another way to look at this "enlarging" is as a spiritual application for each one of us: We need to **expand our capacity for God's presence.**

Verse 2... Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.

The tent imagery is a reference to the tabernacle in Exodus 33:7-11...

...Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting."...The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

The tent or tabernacle was the place that God met up close with the priests. Now, since Christ established the New Covenant, we no longer have to go to an earthly tabernacle in Jerusalem, but we as individuals are the tabernacle of God. He lives in us. 1 Cor. 3:16

Just as the OT tabernacle had to be prepared and maintained, so we must prepare ourselves and maintain our relationship with the Lord. And here, in Isaiah, God is actually encouraging us to enlarge our capacity for his presence in us.

Enlarge the place of your tent = Grow. We recently talked about 5 stages of spiritual growth. You can be a newborn infant spiritually, but you should be growing into a mature son of God.

☞ **1 Peter 2:2-3** says to **grow up in your salvation**

☞ **2 Peter 3:18** says to **grow in the grace and knowledge of** our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Stretch your tent curtains wide = here's another reference to the tabernacle...the inner part of the Tabernacle was made of curtains. A specific curtain functioned as a door to the Tabernacle. Still another curtain or "veil" divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. That's where God actually met with the priests.

☞ He wants us to stretch and **enlarge our hearts to meet with him**. Sometimes stretching can hurt a bit, but ultimately, it's good for us.

☞ **Jeremiah 29:13...**You will seek me and find me when you **seek me with all your heart**.

I think this stretching of the tent curtains has more meaning still. Nomadic tents had curtains for walls which could be opened to let in a breeze. We must **encourage the moving of the Holy Spirit in our midst**.

Which one is bigger, a water bottle or a balloon? The water bottle is bigger. Which one will hold more? The balloon. Now what is the problem with the water bottle? It is restricted. It cannot expand. It is not elastic. This isn't about your size, it's about your ability to stretch with what God wants to do. If you take this same balloon it holds even more because of its ability to stretch and expand.

It's why Jesus said you can't put new wine into old wineskins. Old wineskins dry up and lose their elasticity. The Lord pours his Holy Spirit into those who are stretchable and willing to expand with him.

☞ **Garrison** (*fortify; protect*) **your Hopes**

Verse 2... Don't hold back = don't limit God by unbelief or by half-heartedness

☞ **Stir up your faith**. Caleb was full of faith and followed God wholeheartedly

The man told his doctor that he wasn't able to do all the things around the house that he used to do. When the examination was complete, he said, "Now, Doc, I can take it. Tell me in plain English what is wrong with me." "Well, in plain English," the doctor replied, "you're just lazy." "Okay," said the man. "Now give me the medical term so I can tell my wife."

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

☞ Lengthen your cords = **Strengthen your love and unity**. In the bible, cords often refer to relationships...

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Hosea 11:4

I led them with CORDS OF HUMAN KINDNESS, with ties of love

Sometimes we grow weary while we wait. We need each other to stay strong. Remind each other of God's promises. The enemy would love to divide us and leave us feeling helpless and alone. Let's build our friendships and keep on loving and encouraging each other.

☞ Strengthen your stakes = **Stand firm**. 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

☞ **Suit up** Ephesians 6:14-18... Stand firm then, with the belt of truth... the breastplate of righteousness... the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace... the shield of faith... the helmet of salvation... the sword of the Spirit... pray in the Spirit on all occasions... be alert... always keep on praying

☞ **Strain forward** Philippians 3:13-14; 4:1... one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus... **1** that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

☞ **Stay alert** 1 Peter 5:9... Resist him, standing firm in the faith

☞ **Seize the promise**. Verse 3 You will spread out = Your influence will grow; your harvest will increase. Prophecies of revival and growth will come to pass.

Verse 4 Not ashamed or humiliated = God will keep his promises to us!

☞ **Psalms 145:13**

the Lord is faithful to all his promises

Let's partner with him! Gather the Harvest. Grow your Heart. Garrison your Hopes. Enlarge your tent; stretch your curtains; lengthen your cords; strengthen your stakes. Don't be afraid. Don't hold back. Let's move forward with God.

The Power of Your Presence