

Enlarging Your Tent

(Isaiah 54)

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God is speaking to the church-at-large, to individual churches, and to individuals in the Body of Christ – all at the same time. Let's be reminded of this as we look at a familiar context – Isaiah 54. This is positively a “now word” from God, although it certainly addresses a situation in the lives of the people to whom it was originally given. In this chapter of Isaiah, we find many familiar verses, not the least of which is verse 2: “*Enlarge the place of thy tent.*” As is true with most contexts in the scriptures, there is a **key here that will unlock our understanding**. Something important about these keys is that if they are lost or left undiscovered, we may as well not press on, trying to gain insight from the passage. Such is a valid concern as we look at Isaiah 54.

Keys help us in applying the truths of God's Word. For instance, the key for “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...” (Ps.23:4) is: walking *through* the valley. Having walked through something, we can then sing with greater understanding what was penned a number of years ago by Andre Crouch: “If I never had a problem, I wouldn't know that God could solve them...” Haven't we discovered that our assurance in God's faithfulness, our increase in trusting God, came as a result of going through something? There was *a key* that opened our awareness: God is *still* on the throne and He *does* remember His own!

And so now we will find a key to “enlarge your tents.” The prophet Isaiah is talking to a group of people, the Israelites, God's own people, who have known some tragedy – *as a result of their own sin*. Never lose sight as to why God allowed the children of Israel to be captured by their enemies, first in Egypt and then here, by Babylon. *Their captivity was a result of their turning from God*. They disregarded the terms of the covenant. (See Deut. 10 and 11. Note “so that” and “if-then”).

I don't know why it is we, as individuals, feel that we have a right to be angry with God when He corrects us. We say things like, “I don't know why the Almighty does so much to *me*. I've served Him all my life!” The implication being that we are innocent of any wrongdoing, yet have so many negatives in our lives – it must be at God's hand. That is a pattern that follows all the way through scripture. The message here in Isaiah is a wonderfully *positive* word to these recently released captives. It's all about growth.

The message is: “Get ready for growth because it is going to happen.” But something preceded this moment. And something that did *not* happen is being exhorted to occur now before the promises of growth are fulfilled. I think we have to see this “something,” because when God puts a thing *first*, it seems to me it is *first* in His mind, and warrants our undivided attention.

The chapter opens with this: “*Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate that the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. 2Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes; 3For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.*” (54:1-3)

“*Sing, O barren.*” It is no shock to God that they're barren. He knows their situation. *They* are focused on the negatives. (Selah!) They realize that only about a fifteenth of the number of people that came out of Egypt's captivity centuries earlier have returned to their Promised Land this time to rebuild the nation. “We can't get it done. We don't have enough people.” “We can't get it done, we don't have enough money!” “We can't get it done; we don't have enough gifts operating.” Sound too familiar? And the

Lord says, "I'll tell you what – SING!" Woefully, our reply is something like this: "I *can't* sing now." You can if you remember Whose you are!

This is a wonderfully positive word in Isaiah 54! Although it is directed to ancient Israel, we know God is always speaking to future generations as well, and to the Body of Christ specifically. What this is saying to the Church – THE Church – is, "You **are** going to grow, regardless of all the negative circumstances that seem to be happening throughout the world." Know that **God** has a Church! They are *His* people; they are numbered by Him, just as He numbered the Israelites coming out of their captivities (Num.1:2;46-47; Ezr.2:64,65). And, God knows where, when, and how the expansion is going to occur.

Regardless of all the negative things we have seen surrounding the Church in past years – that does not change God's promises. God's promises are yea and amen! (2Cor.1:20). If He says it – you can count on it! God is going to fulfill His Word. *But there always is a condition.* We need to understand, it's a promise to us – **IF** – "*If and when you do this, here's what's going to happen.*"

One of the things I want to emphasize is that you can't enlarge the tent – make it bigger – until you pick up the old stakes. There is no moving a tent that is still attached to the old stakes. And you can't pick up those stakes until you find them by clearing the land of the overgrown weeds.

Some of us are so staked in (and weedy!) – we use terms like this: "Well, *they* may say this, but I'll tell you what **I** believe..." "We've *always* done it this *other* way." Have you ever heard that? It is a stake that's driven very deeply into the ground, and weeds have grown up all around it till people don't even see the stakes anymore. You cannot *broaden* a tent with that condition.

We cannot grow until we are willing to till that land – break up the fallow, hardened ground (Hos.10:12) – and begin to look for the stakes. We need to ask ourselves, and the Lord: What is it that has had me pinned down to "littleness?" Why is it that I can't think beyond this tiny little world that I live in? This tiny little situation? What is it that has me locked into this place? Find that old stake! Most likely, there are several.

"Well, what are the "old stakes?" Thank you for asking. For starters, *every pre-conceived idea* you are holding on to. "Our church doesn't believe in *that!*"

When I travel, I am able to experience many different kinds of church situations. I particularly like to watch the choir members. Sometimes the music is loud and they sing the words so fast that I have a hard time keeping up with them. I can't read that fast, let alone sing all those words! ☺ And they expect me to join them, and *praise* and *worship* with all that? (::whine::) "Everything's *changed!*" And we often hear, "Whatever happened to 'Amazing Grace?' I know that one! All four verses!" But, if I want to, I can get a word in here and there, and I can praise with all of it! And I do – gladly! Pull up those stakes that keep you from growing in the things of the Lord!

There are choirs that are professionally rehearsed until they are perfect, but some of their faces do not reflect the glorious God to Whom they are supposed to be singing. Other choirs may be more relaxed and not wear matching choir robes, but they really *believe* what they sing! And it shows – it shows all over them! And the dancers come up, but they don't just do a step they've practiced! They go to the throne and *worship* the Lord! I love that!! We need to be sensitive to what God is directing in "change" and be certain it glorifies and pleases Him. But when it is from His Spirit – oh, what joy we can enter into as we worship our God in the congregation. If you don't keep your tent stakes where you can reach them, you will have a problem and will probably miss out on none of His greatest blessings.

What about those "weeds?" Listen – by digging down through the *weeds of tradition* – church traditions – and finding my tent stakes – and being *determined*, not just *willing* – determined to remove them through my conscious effort – I can clear my own land. You see, I would prefer to just "pray" the tent

stakes out and the weeds away – because I agree with the Lord they need to be moved – or removed. “Lord, if my feelings are not pleasing to You, just get rid of them.” ☺ I can almost hear His response, “I’m not going to do it for you. Pull up those weeds yourself.” Hello?

In a church I particularly like, I have observed – earrings – in guys’ ears! ☺ And they’re in the choir! I grew up in a church that didn’t believe even the women could wear them! ☺ And now, in my own church family, men are wearing earrings! I look for those men and watch to see if they’re “faking” their praise to God. ☺ Most often, I plainly see the glory of the Lord rise up in them. Then I think back to how it “used to be” and say, “Lord, do You not see the ears?” ☺ I know what that’s like – “used to be” – because I’m 75 years old and I know how deep to throw down those stakes. You just pound them in and “what we have always believed is...!” Pound – pound – pound. And they get so deep and covered over.

And then the Lord responds to my inquiry, “Yes, I see them. I want growth for thee.” And I say, “Oh, do Lord! Stretch me out!” And I hear, “Stretch it out yourself!” ☺ Then I plead, “Can’t You pull up these stakes?” His wisdom replies, “You’d just put them right back in the same old hole!” You see, Church, I’m trying to help us take hold of a Truth. **What we have to face is whether or not we honestly and truly desire to grow!**

When you have a busy church-calendar, with many opportunities for drama and the dance and other creative programs, the building can be packed out with people. When there are so many talented voices and several who can lead the worship times, and have humble hearts that allow the Lord to lead through whomever He selects, there is something we must watch out for: All of this can take place with our appreciation – but does it take place with our participation?

It’s a good thing when the worship leaders remain quiet for a chorus and invite the congregation to sing alone. We must learn to *participate* in worship on whatever level we are able. “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (Ps.100:1). “Sing unto the Lord, all the earth” (Ps.96:1). Worship takes place in individual hearts and we must not be content to be observers. That is the easy way when new songs and choruses are introduced. The tendency is not to make the effort to do something new and different – because we like the old way better. There’s a stake. Dig it up. Otherwise you will remain a captive of your past.

If you think I’m exaggerating about the situation, then you have never read the whine in Psalm 137. “*By the rivers of Babylon [in their captivity], there we sat down, yes, we wept. We remembered Zion.*” They remembered their former state, the “good times.” They remembered when so-and-so was in the choir and so-and-so was in the orchestra and when it was just wonderful to meet together in the old days. They said, “*We remembered and ‘we hanged up our harps on the willows in the midst’ of our captivity. ‘For they that carried us away captive required of us a song. And they that wasted us required of us mirth [or joy], saying...’*” Their captors said to them, “*Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*” And the people cried, “*How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?*” (Psalm 137:1-4).

God looks at this group of captives – His people – His called ones – His Israel – His Zion – His *favorites* – and says, “Where are you?” “Well, we were up there in Babylon, captives. And, can You believe that they tried to get us to sing?” Listen – here were people who once sang the glorious praises of God every chance they had. When something negative occurred in their lives, they hung up their harps. We’re not much different today, only we hang up our guitars refusing to sing praises to God when *our* circumstances get tough.

Their question – “*How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?*” – is the question that brings us to the **key** of growth individually, growth as a church, and growth in the universal church. **The key is learning to sing the praises of God in a strange land!**

So we must ask: What prevents us from singing? The first obvious thing that we read in Isaiah 54 is that they were focused – on their captivity. If you listen to the conversations of too many Christians – they are

so negative. We fret: “Oh, I tell you – don’t you just wonder what’s going to happen in the world next?” NO, I don’t – not really. What God wants me to know He wrote – I read it – the rest I’m glad I don’t know.

This has been a difficult year for me personally – one of the most difficult of my life. I’ve been a fairly healthy and well-cared for woman most of my life. 2004 started out with a torn meniscus in my knee and an operation. Then, it just seemed as if one thing after another after another after another hit me – all year long – and all physical situations. I felt a little like a child’s “knock ‘em-sock ‘em” toy clown that kids punch. The toy topples down then bounce right back up again for more hits. Well, I felt like God’s “clown” all year. I’d bounce up, declaring in faith my healing, and BAM! I’d be down again, trying to get back up. I went through all the “religious antics.” I did everything anyone told me. I claimed it. I named it. I stepped on it – “He’s under my feet! He’s under my...” Ouch! That knee still hurt. Everything I knew to do, I did. I exhausted everything I had ever preached about healing! ☺ And everything I had believed for years! I went back through it and did it and I *explained* to the Lord what a *woman* He had! ☺

This has been such a hard time for me and none of it was actually related to my age. To be honest, I suppose if I compared my circumstances with many other people, my life was, as we say in our slang, “a piece of cake.” Just because someone has it worse than I do doesn’t necessarily make me feel better! ☺ If I ultimately learned anything through this year, and let us all pray reverently that I have, if I was carefully paying attention, there has been a demonstration of the *faithfulness of God!*

When I bawled in self-pity, He faithfully – was silent. ☺ When I pounded on His door in prayer, demanding certain things (“in Jesus’ Name!” of course), He faithfully – was silent. I experienced weeks, no, months of His silence. Oh, He spoke to me in the Word – and I did read the Word – searching for His voice wherever I could find Him. In fact, I even threatened Him with the Word! “Your Word **says!**” ☺ Oh, you have too? I do understand I’m not alone in this! ☺ And in His merciful kindness and gentleness – He didn’t say a thing! ☺

Through it all, I came to realize *if I never feel His presence again* – and that is a horrendous thought! – but, if I never *feel* that joy, that jubilation, that excitement, that thrill, that delight – followed by the love that comes – that absolutely *floods* over you when you know you’re in His presence and He could ask you anything you would do it! “I’ll go anywhere! I’ll do anything! I’m Yours, Lord!” You know that kind of feeling – if you never *feel* it again, it changes NOTHING!

Some of you have been through equally difficult things this past year as well. When life’s circumstances hit you in an area that you feel faithful or, full of faith – when you’re not like the Israelites that *deserved* what they got – when you pay your tithe and still have financial problems – when you give above and beyond what you really feel you have to give – when you make a sacrifice to do it – when you fast and you’ve never fasted before – and you can’t turn things around – there’s a temptation to *hang up your harp!* “Don’t ask me to sing until God does it!” “I’m no hypocrite. If I don’t feel like singing – I don’t sing!” But Church, we do not have that option.

The whole **KEY** to this entire passage in Isaiah 54 is in the first word of the first chapter – “**Sing.**” Sing. Why? Why is it so important to Him that we sing? ***Because it causes my focus to change when I sing unto the Lord!*** No matter where you are, focus on Him. No matter what you’re experiencing – if your home is broken and you feel as if your life is falling apart – no matter what is occurring in your life, concentrate on Whose you are! Think of the worst thing that could happen to you – ***it never changes God’s faithfulness and/or His loving care!***

How can a loving God turn to a nation like Israel, that has just come out of captivity, and they are so few in numbers compared to who and how many they were when they first came out from captivity from Egypt! When they came out of Egypt, there were millions (Ex.12:37,38), but now they’ve come out of

Babylon and there are so few of them returning to the Promised Land. How can He command them to sing?

It would be like this today. When every seat in your sanctuary was filled, it was easy for you to rejoice. “Oh, we go to the greatest church. I’ll tell you!” When every seat in the choir was filled – (and it used to be here until the pastor started talking about *holiness* as a *way of life*!) When everything was *success* in our eyes – in our thinking – we thought we were BIG! We were proud, “One of the largest churches in this part of our city!” We weren’t **big**. We were being positioned to get big! Not numerically – only.

If you don’t have a need – if everything seems to be exactly what you want it to be – there’s no cry to grow. There’s no pulling up a stake! “I’ve served the Lord nigh on this number of years and He’s always been there for me. God’s good and I serve Him – my kids serve Him – my home’s never broken up. Everything is good and I see no reason to change a thing I’m doing.” It’s easy to sing in the good times but even *that* is a kind of captivity! Trapped in the past successes of life and seeing no need to pull up those old stakes, seeing no reason to stretch and grow. That’s bondage.

Then, when our circumstances change toward the negatives of life, God comes on the scene then and says – you’ll see it all through Scripture – “Sing and praise.” “Sing and praise.” “Sing and praise.” Why? I mean, how does He, if I may say it this way – dare – to say that to us when we are at our lowest places in life? When He knows what we’re going through! Have you ever wondered that? Tell the truth. Of course you have.

We whine to God – “How can You say to me, ‘Sing.’ I can cry! I can suck thumb!” ☺ “But don’t tell me to *sing* – and *praise* – when people are talking against me. And when I don’t know my future and I can’t...” this and this and this... “Don’t tell me to **sing**! Well, if you hit a minor key – I could, maybe, sing a dirge!”

I can answer this question or I would not dare to ask it. God Almighty dares to tell us to sing in our lowest positions because *He knows what He’s going to do for us!* He says to them, “Sing, O barren.” Let me paraphrase: “Sing. You have been unfruitful – unproductive. You haven’t done diddly pooh!” It’s worded a little different in the King James... ☺ “You’ve been a failure. You haven’t done what I told you to do and I let you get a good lickin’ for it. Now, sing!”

They wailed, “I have no song! I can’t sing! Everything’s gone wrong.” And *we* start whining like the lyrics of most western cowboy songs, “Ahhh, she done me wrong!” That’s the way some of our prayers must sound, like a lament. “I’ve sacrificed a lot of things to walk this narrow way. I gave up fame and fortune – and I’m worth a lot to Thee!” That’s a real song! Can you believe that is a church song? It goes on: “And then I hear Him gently speak to me – **I LEFT A THRONE OF GLORY!**” I said, “Lord, You’re yelling.” ☺ He said, “You don’t get it! You don’t even know Whose you are! I do *dare* to say to you, ‘Sing!’ because of Who I am.”

We must not stay focused on failure. We absolutely are not to stay in a barren and desolate position – unless we choose that! Now that truth really takes away your self-pity! “Well, I sure didn’t choose to be in this situation.” No, but you chose to stay there! There’s a **key** to opening that door of desolation. And that key is obedience to what God says. It isn’t *just* tithing – it isn’t *just* offerings – it isn’t *just* fasting – it isn’t *just* praying – it isn’t *just* praising. It’s **obedience** to the Word of God, and standing firmly on Who God really is, *knowing* that all of *His* resources are our resources!

In the midst of your nighttime – He says, “Sing!” Ours is a whine: “But I don’t have a song! I don’t know any words to say that would be truthful! ‘You’ve been so good to me?’” We may chuckle now, but too often that is exactly the way we are with God when our “things” simply don’t go smoothly or work out how we want. We seldom bother to put a tune to it. It’s just a wail!! And when God says, “Sing!”

He is saying, “This is an admonition to you (a caution, warning, mild rebuke), because if you will sing – now – in your nighttime – I’ll **give** you songs in the night.”

All through the Psalms, it always amuses me (it used to upset me) when I’d read and half a psalm is open complaining to the Lord. “O why hast thou forsaken us?” “Why hast thou turned Your back on us?” (e.g. Psa.22; 28; 69) The only thing that saves a psalm like that is that they speak in King James! ☺ “Why hast Thou done us so?” “Why?” “Why?” “Why?” And then at the end of the psalm we’ll see – “My soul shall yet praise Him!” And I think, “WOW! That’s a song?”

But you see, when the Lord gives us a song in the night, the words change. The words no longer depict what we are feeling or seeing or hearing. *His* words reveal – Who. “Why art thou distressed, O, my soul? Hope thou in – God!” My hope is *not* in a change in my situation or circumstances. “Hope thou in *God*” (Psa.42:5,11; see also Psa.103).

If this is a place where you find yourself today, and you’ve been nursing that negative situation in your life saying (wailing, whining, crying), “Lord, I want joy again. I *want* to praise You – and I will – as soon as You do what I tell You to do!” If that is your cry, you are missing the key to growth! You (and I) speak from *experiences*. As I’ve already shared, I know what it is to reach down and pull up those old tent stakes. They’re deep and they’re stuck and they’re often filthy and they usually don’t come up (and out) easily! It’s hard to uproot things that you’ve held to for years! Especially because at the moment, you don’t know where you’re going to put them next! But they have to move out and the tent has to stretch – and *I’m the tent* and don’t know it! Hello?

I pull that thing up – that old habit – that old way of thinking – that old whatever (when you’re my age, it’s all old!). ☺ You may have to “jerk it up” before you can start walking forward. And then, where are you going? “Alright, Lord, I’m no longer *locked* into *tradition*. Now what? What am I going to do with them?” Scripture says, “Stretch them out!” “Where?” we demand. “How far are You going to go? I mean, now they’re *dancing* in the church!” ☺ How much are You going to let them get by with?” Oh, I hope you’re hearing me. The humor and laughter is anesthetizing. It allows us to step back and take a more objective look at ourselves, trying to see what God sees.

Throughout this past year, probably the most difficult part of it all was “people.” Too often, they would see me and inquire, “What is God saying these days, Iverna?” When God is being silent and someone says that – you just want to cringe. Everyone *expects* you to be hearing a “now” thing from God. No one wants to admit the truth and say, “He isn’t *saying* anything to me.” The temptation is to lie. ☺ “Well, He’s saying ‘Yea’ and ‘Thus...’ But through this year, Hallelujah!, I learned to be honest enough to say, “I don’t know what He’s saying. I’m not sure He’s saying anything deeply profound at this moment. Maybe, ‘Hold on.’ or ‘Hang in there.’” But that is not what people want to hear, especially from a preacher! They’re looking for direction and all I can say is, “Just hold fast to what you *know*.”

In my Daddy’s church, we used to sing, “I’m going through, Jesus, I’m going through. I’ll pay the price whatever others do...” It’s through those dry years or months that we absolutely realize that without God, we are nothing. I have nothing – I am nothing – I have not gotten this far in life because I, in myself, had anything. During those times, or, as some have written in wonderful books, during those “barren seasons,” we find that God is *real*! He is what He says He is and everything He says He is! He *is* ever-faithful!

The Lord just says, “Sing.” And, “Pull up the stakes and move.” Isaiah 54:2 says it this way: “*Enlarge the place of thy tent... stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations... spare not... lengthen thy cords... strengthen thy stakes.*” It boils down to this: simple obedience. That’s all it is. You just pick up those old stakes and start walking! We want clarification, confirmation, specifics. We want to be certain of every detail ahead of time. We want an explanation for everyone that asks, “What does God say?” “He

isn't saying anything new! The only thing I can say is, I don't know all He's going to do for me or with me or through me, but I know He said, 'you've got to pick up the old – and STRETCH!'"

Sing! Let your voice be *loud* (see Psa.8:11). Let it be heard. Because the resolution to the Israelites' problem was not being set free from the ones that held them in bondage. The resolution for those who *cannot* sing and are upset over everything is not to be set free from their captors. I have seen people delivered at thousands of altars in my lifetime – on the spot! It's not hard to get people delivered. "In the Name of Jesus," we set the captive free (Isa.61:1; 42:5-8; Lk.4:18; 2Tim.2:26). "In the Name of Jesus," we break the power of habits! "In the Name of Jesus." There's *power* in that Name! (Lk.10:19; Mk.16:17,18)

People are set free by the miraculous power of God and too many simply walk out the door only to pick up the same old heavy load and look for the same old holes that the tent stakes fit in! They go right back to the familiar – despondency, despair, discouragement. "I try to stay overcoming, but you wouldn't believe where I work. It's just constant taking of the Lord's Name in vain, on the right and on the left, and lying and cheating and actually, we're taught to lie to customers and I – you know, my *joy* is gone. I just feel *contaminated*." Well, poor baby!"

There is a **POWER** resident within you that is greater than any power in this world! (1Jn.4:4; Rom.8:31; Jn.15:4; 1Jn.2:24). There should be a presence of the Lord that rises up and even shows on your countenance, until people taking just one look can say, "Oh! There's something about *you* that's different." It isn't a matter of carrying a big black Bible to work. It isn't a matter of putting Scriptures in your spiritual machine gun, aiming at people, and saying, "The Bible says...! The Bible says...! The Bible says...!" as if you're spewing out verses as a round of ammunition. It's a matter of "let your light so shine ... that others may see your good works!" (Mt.5:16). You're the one who doesn't cheat. You're the one that doesn't lie. You're the one that has answers when no one else does. You're the one who shows there *is* a God in heaven and He lives within YOU!

Freedom is easy to achieve. If you're in bondage today, you can be set free with one prayer! In Jesus' Name, you can be set free from habits! But *you* are going to have to pick up the tent stake – look at it and say, "It's over now! No one else has the control over me! It's either God in control, or I am!"

Such is the condition of Zion, Israel, at the writing of this particular portion of scripture. They have been captives, and they deserved it each time because they looked away from the Lord! They served other gods. They relied on their own strengths and abilities and ignored His.

Growth. We are going somewhere, Church. We're going (growing) somewhere as Individuals, as individual churches, and as a people of God. We must discard all the past anxieties we have carried. "You can't eat with *sinners*, and you can't touch uncleanness because you might get – *unclean*." If we never get near them, how are we ever going reach them with the Gospel or influence them for the Lord? We could call to them – long distance: "God loves you! He really does!" ☺ But we will never *win* them from a distance. We win them standing in front of a godless generation, letting our love and light shine *for them*. It's the Light of Jesus that will draw them to the Father (Jn.14:6b), and we carry that Light (Mt.5:14-16).

We are going to see some *changes* in the future, Church. I promise you, you will not vote "Yes" on everything! We sincerely pray, "Lord, fill this place with people. Lord, just pack it out!" He says, "I am, but you won't like all of them." What God says to His people, to Zion, to Israel, is, "I'm going to enlarge you – with the Gentiles." I can almost hear their lament: "Not the Gentiles, Lord. *We're* the Chosen ones! We are Your people – we remind You of that. The Gentiles are – outsiders. We are – the insiders."

To the Church God says, “I know what I’m going to do for you. And *what* I’m going to do, you’re going to love. *How* I’m going to do it” – ☺ – “you’re going to vote ‘No,’ because the enlargement to My Zion will come when I add – the Gentiles! I’m not taking a vote. I’m telling you about a purpose. My purpose has not just started for the Gentiles – it has *always* been for them! (Eph.3:5,6). I planned all along to bring them into the fold (Jn.10:16). I have a plan. And when My Son comes, He is going to break down that wall between Jew and Gentile (1Cor.12:12-27; Gal.3:28). It will be one Church, one people, one Lord, one God, one baptism (Eph.4:3-6). One fellowship with Him! (1Jn.1:3).

Listen now – the Gentiles represented everything the Jews considered unclean, unworthy, unlovely, unlovable, and totally detestable. They considered themselves to be superior in every way over every other culture, over every other people-group. Unfortunately, that’s the prevalent attitude today in church after church after church. “We were here first. We’re the ones that built it! We’re the ones that stood firm through the tests.” Right! Is it any surprise then that God is ready to add others? Have you ever thought about that, Church? The Gentiles were despised. The Jewish people were not out trying to win them. They didn’t want any part with those “dogs.”

And God says to His people, “Yes, you are My people. You’ll always be My people. I love you with an everlasting love (Jer.31:3). I have an everlasting covenant with you (Is.55:8; Jer.32:40; Is.54:8; 61:8), but I’m sending My Son to break down that wall of partition! (Eph.2:14). And you’re going to break forth on the right and on the left, in front of you and behind. I am going to add to My Church with or without your vote” (See Eph.3:6; 1Cor.12:12,13; Col.3:10,11).

“Sing unto the Lord, a new song!” (Ps.33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). And they start coming. People that we voted “No” on will start coming to *this* church. ☺ We might say, or at least think, “They’ve never fit any other church. They’re not going to be faithful. They have no money. They have no talent. Don’t fill up *this* church with *those* kinds of people!” And God says, “Do you have any idea Who you’re talking to?” Ezek. 37:14 relates to us that what God intended to do, He *would* do – and “then shall ye know that I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I have performed it, saith God.”

Let’s just take a quick look at WHO our God is. First of all, God is *infinite* – meaning, with no limits, cannot be measured, very great in size and extent. The divine attributes are *eternal*. Infinite past, infinite future. His is infinite goodness – infinite justice – infinite truth – infinite love – infinite mercy. He is Omnipotent – all-powerful. Omniscient – all-knowing. Omnipresent – He’s everywhere! **WHAT A GOD WE SERVE!**

Now, if *this* God is *your* God, and He speaks to you – I don’t think there’s room for a vote! And there certainly should not be an argument. This is **God**, who has had a plan before the world began! (Psa.139:15,16; Jer.1:5; 29:11). It has always been His plan to bless His people – so that they might bless the earth with the knowledge of the Lord. “And the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall fill all the earth.” It will be just like the “waters covering the sea” (Hab.2:14; Isa.11:9).

This *plan* is being activated more rapidly today than at any time in history that we have ever known. Ask any teacher. Ask any researcher. Our sense of time has been so speeded up! We have seen one fulfilled biblical prophecy after another, fulfillment after fulfillment. When I was a little girl, the first time I saw the word “Israel” in the newspaper, I was so excited! I thought Jesus was going to come that night! So, I went out on the porch and got a mop-stick, leaned against the railing and tried to push myself up. ☺ I really did that. I had been taught that when you begin to hear about Israel, the times are near. That was 70 years ago. “Well, yeah, that’s how I feel. You know, everybody says ‘He’s coming soon,’ but I’ve heard that for x number of years...” Figure it out. If you’ve heard that for 70 years, “soon” is sooner than it was then! ☺

What we must see, Church, is how we *have failed* to fulfill the purpose of God for our lives. We thought that when we accepted Jesus, or as we say, “found Him” (although He never was lost) – when we

accepted Jesus, everything from then on was for *us*, as individuals. Where do we get that idea? It's not in the Book.

God gives you love, and takes away hate. He gives you love that "by this shall all men know that you are My disciples, that ye have love one for another" (Jn.13:35). He gives you insight and knowledge, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And the reason He gives you these is that you might utilize them, or allow Him to utilize them through you, to bless others (1Cor.14:12, 26; Eph.4:11,12).

We live in such a self-centered society, and that isn't so bad – except – we have adopted the same mentality in the Church, at least conceptually – "Every man for himself." There is no place in this Book that even hints that that is acceptable! "I will seek that which was lost" that in being found they might be "lights to the world" (Mt.18:11; Lk.19:10; Jn.3:17; Mt.5:14; Phil.2:15). You can no longer dismiss personal responsibility and then expect to be the "claim it" of the blessings of God.

Make no mistake, I do not pretend to understand everything that is taking place in the world today. I truly don't "get it!" I wish I did. I wish I was this great prophetic teacher that could just *explain* to you every step that's being taken today. I can't – and I won't try – and you're glad! ☺ What I can say is, "I know God is in control." He was in control before it started. He's in control now – and He has given us the promise of growth, personally and in the Church at large."

It isn't enough to just say, "He's an *infinite* God" – He's also an *intimate* God. He's *personal*. His very Name for Himself, Jehovah (as is used over 5000 times in the scriptures) adds the personality, or the personhood of God. He said, "I'm Elohim – the Creator, the Judge (Gen.1:26); Jehovah Elyon – Most High, LORD God above (Gen.14:19,20); Jehovah Jireh – I'm going to take care of you, I will provide (Gen.22:13,14); Jehovah Rapha – I will heal (Ex.15:25,26); Jehovah Tsidkenu – I am your Righteousness (Jer.23:6). I'm Jehovah Nissi – I'm your Banner, your Conqueror (Ex.17:15); I'm Jehovah Shalom – I'll bring Peace to you in the stormy days)Jud.6:24); I am Shamah – I'm THERE (Ezk.48:35)! I love that! "Where's the Lord?" "I'm there." Jehovah M'Kaddesh –the One who sanctifies us (Lev.20:8); Adonai – Lord; Master (Gen.15:2) see Lord, not LORD Psa.114:7; Ex.4:10); Rohi – My Shepherd (Psa.23:1); El Shaddai – the Almighty, All-sufficient One (Gen.17:1). He says, "That's what I'll be to you! That's Who I am – all of these and even more. That's My Name – and I am TRUE to My Name. I am all this to you!"

That's how He can say to us, "Sing." When we look away from *our* captivity, and the few numbers of us, the problems we face – the failures – all of these things – we see this GOD – "high and lifted up" (Isa.6:1a). But something else happens! What is it? What comes down? His *train* – not a locomotive – but the garment of God fills the temple (Is.6:1b). You know what that garment is, don't you? It's us! His Church! *We* are the extension of God.

Shall I ask you a shocking question? IF – if you, or if I, had been in the part of the train, the *hem*, that the lady with the issue of blood, made her way through the crowd to touch, would she have been made whole? (Mt.9:20-22) Oh, Church, please hear my heart today. ***We don't replace Him, we extend Him.***

The more I have of Him, the greater the extension. It's not just growth numerically and financially and physically – it's that ability to touch the nations of the world. Thus, when we stand at the endtime and we say, "And all nations shall come and worship before Him, for Thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev.15:4), we will know we were a part of that. Oh, maybe only a small part. It takes *all* of us together to fill that train. It isn't just one superstar preacher, recognizable because of television exposure. Each one of us may be only a little drop, but the bucket cannot be full without us!

I remember when the word kept coming through the prophetic circles a few years back, "The day of superstardom is over." And the people shouted and rejoiced! Who took their places? Sadly, we have done – what they did for David when he was dying. They went out and found a young maiden and tried to bring her in to excite him to life (1Kngs.1:1-4). Dear God, we've done so much of that!

We've found anybody that once excited the Church, and we bring him in and pump him back to life, stand him up and hand him a microphone, and hope to God people hear something. ***God is not looking for replacements of Himself***, and He's not looking for replacements for anyone He ever anointed – He's looking for His Church! He is looking for the Church to be the Church as He planned for us to be!

And His Church is the church who will ***sing*** – “when the day is bright...” Remember that old song? “Trust in the Lord and don't despair. He is a friend so true. No matter what your troubles are, **Jesus** will see you through! So, sing! when the day is bright. Sing! in the darkest night. Every day, all the way, let us sing! Sing! Sing!”