

From Barrenness to Fruitfulness

When Lawrence of Arabia was in Paris after World War I with some of his Arab friends, he showed them the sights of the city: the Arch of Triumph, the Louvre, Napoleon's tomb, the Champs Elysees, but none of these things impressed them. The thing that really interested them the most was the tap in the bathtub of the hotel room. They spent much time in turning it on and off. They found it amazing that one could turn a handle and get all the water he wanted.

Later, when they were ready to leave Paris and return to the East, Lawrence found them in the bathroom with wrenches trying to disconnect the tap. "You see," they said, "it is very dry in Arabia. What we need are taps. If we have them, we will have all the water we want." Lawrence had to explain that the effectiveness of the taps did not lie in themselves but in the immense reservoirs of water to which they were attached, and he had to point out that behind this lay the rain and snowfalls of the Alps.

1 Samuel 1: 1 – 20

1) Barrenness

- Barrenness can mean infertility or sterility – as in the case of Hannah – or it can mean unfruitfulness, desolate, empty
 - How often we feel that our lives or our work is like this.
- Barrenness can be a physical hardship, emotional turmoil, family stress, financial problems or a fruitless ministry.
- There are various factors that can cause barrenness in our lives and sin is a major contributing factor.
- However barrenness isn't necessarily due to sin – sometimes it is the doing of God Himself
 - The Lord had closed Hannah's womb (v.5)
- Hannah wasn't the only woman who was barren who the Lord was going to use
 - Sarai, Abraham's wife, was barren (Genesis 11: 30)
 - Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was barren (Genesis 25: 21)
 - Rachel, Jacob's wife, was barren (Genesis 29: 31)
- Besides these women who were barren God often led His people through times of barrenness
 - He caused Israel to flourish but then they were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years
 - God set them free from Egypt and promised to take them to a land flowing with milk and honey. They got to the edge of the land and rebelled against God so God took them through 40 years of barrenness in the wilderness.
 - David was promised to be the King of Israel but spent years fleeing for his life before that happened.
 - Jesus experienced 40 days in the wilderness before He started His ministry.
- Barrenness can cause:
 - Heartache
 - Frustration
 - Confusion
 - Depression
- Can we get out of the state of barrenness or should we resign ourselves to it?
- John 15: 8 "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."
 - It is not God's intention that we remain in states of barrenness but that we bear fruit.

2) The Transition from Barrenness to Fruitfulness

- The first step in our transition from barrenness to fruitfulness is a desire to live a fruitful life and move out of the particular barrenness that we are in.
- Cry out to the Lord for a deliverance from our barren state to fruitfulness.
 - Someone said that God answers the serious seeker after Him and not the casual enquirer.
 - There is a connection with God – a grafting into Him to draw from Him as a branch draws its life from the tree.
 - Anyone can say prayers and read their Bible but are we connecting with God?
- Humility. Hannah didn't care what others thought as she sought the Lord to the point of being misunderstood and rebuked by the priest.
- When God promises to answer your prayers hold onto His promise.
 - Taking hold of God's promise brings joy to our lives even before we see the promise fulfilled.
- Patience to allow God to fulfill His promises in His time
 - Once Hannah received the promise she stopped being depressed and left the issue in God's hands.
 - We need to be careful not to be impatient, as Sarai was, and create Ishmaels.
- A willingness to give up what God has promised
 - Hannah was willing to give up her son and dedicate him to the Lord
 - Abraham was willing to give up Isaac
 - Paul gave up his reputation and credentials and his own ambitions.
- A single mindedness to see God's will be done.
 - Hannah pursued her dream wholeheartedly
 - Joshua and Caleb followed God wholeheartedly (Numbers 32: 12)
 - Doubters are double minded and unstable in all they do (James 1: 8)

3) The Fruitful Life

- We ought not to confuse the fruitful life with success as defined by the world.
 - There are many people in the world who are very successful – very wealthy, have high positions in companies, etc – but aren't fruitful by God's standards.
 - They have not sought God, sought to advance His kingdom and are living contrary to His Word.
 - Many have great wealth but live in distress, depression and anxiety.
- The fruitful life is living in the fullness of what God has made us to be.
 - He has made us different – we are individuals – so that fullness will look differently with each person.
- Our fruitfulness may mean that we can't see the purposes of God directly but we are a link in the chain of God's purposes in the world.
 - Hannah was the mother of Samuel who God used to establish the Kingdom of Israel.
 - Sarai, Rebekah and Rachel became mothers of the nation of Israel through which the Saviour of the world came.
- The fruitful life is living a life full of God in whatever place He puts us to bring glory to Him, to build His Kingdom and to advance His Kingdom.
- It is no longer a life of purposelessness and emptiness but of fullness of God.
 - John 7: 37 – 38 "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Where are you today?

- Is your life barren in any way? What are you doing to start the transition from barrenness to fruitfulness?
- Are you in transition from barrenness to fruitfulness?
- Are you living the fruitful life?