

Barrenness (High Quality)

by David Smithers

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and overcoming barrenness in one's life, which is a heart problem that can only be solved through prayer, fasting, and a sense of reproach.

Duration: 52:36

Scripture: Luke 18:1

Topics: "Barrenness"

Description

In this sermon, Frank Bartleman discusses the topic of barrenness and the need for revival in the church. He emphasizes that the church has been sanctified for a holy union with Jesus Christ, with the purpose of reproducing Christ-like character in our lives and the lives of others. Bartleman highlights the danger of taking shortcuts and trying to make meetings entertaining, stating that true joy and revival can only be found through repentance and prayer. He calls for the priests and ministers to gird themselves, lament, and cry out to the Lord, emphasizing the need for consecration, fasting, and gathering together in sacred assembly. Bartleman concludes by warning of the impending day of the Lord and the destruction that will come if the barrenness and lack of fruitfulness in the church is not addressed.

Transcript

If you don't mind, I'd like to pray one more time. Let me just say that the material that I'm going to share with you this morning, I in no means come out of any position of superiority. This material is just things that the Lord is dealing with my heart, where I believe we're all in need and we're all in this together.

So I just wanted to make that clear. Lord, I just recognize my need for You this morning, Lord. I cannot do this without Your equipping, without Your empowering, without Your unction, Lord Jesus, without Your heart.

And Lord, so I ask that You would give me Your heart to impart the things that You have spoken to me, God. And for Your glory and for the sake of these precious people here, Lord, I pray that You would just stir us, that You would pour out Your Spirit. Holy Spirit, just brood among us this morning and just deal with our hearts, draw our hearts out to You, Lord.

Jesus, just give me clarity of thought. Help me to remember and recall the things that You've spoken to my heart about these different things. Thank You, Lord, for Your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. The subject I'm going to be mentioning is the topic of barrenness, the message that Don referred to that I shared at Grace a couple weeks ago.

And it's really the great need that the church in America has for revival and our present condition of barrenness. I thought it was very appropriate, the tape that was shared this morning, as a real introduction to the material that I'm going to be sharing. Let me just read my opening statement here.

The church has been sanctified and set apart for holy union with Jesus Christ. A primary purpose of this intimate union is the reproduction of Christlike character in our individual lives and the lives of others around us. The Father longs for Christ to bring forth fruit through us, the bride of Christ.

He desires for heirs who bear His name unto His glory. We have been both created and commanded to be fruitful and reproduce after our own kind. The Lord's desire for His church is to be a fruitful bride.

And the sad state of affairs, the truth is that the church of Jesus Christ in America is barren. Her womb is dry and parched and sin abounds on every side and is excused with doctrines of convenience. And God desires for the bride, this barrenness, to be healed.

Now what I want to cover here is just some scriptures that really initially just reaffirm the purpose of the bride of Jesus Christ. So if you will turn with me to Genesis 2 verse 18. And in Genesis 2 here we see, of course, we're all familiar with the narrative of the creation of Adam and then Eve that was brought forth from his side.

But what we have here is a picture of the Lord Jesus and His church. And I want us just to look at this real quickly. And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone.

I will make him a helper comparable to Him. And then down in 21, And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept. And he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place.

Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to man. Exactly the same situation as took place with Jesus Christ. Out of His very side He has brought forth a bride to be a helper, to be a co-laborer, to come alongside.

And somehow, I cannot explain it, but to offer comfort and companionship to Jesus. This is what the Lord longs for. Now if you will, just turn with me real quick to Ephesians 5. I'm sure you all are familiar with these verses and would not doubt at all the analogy that I just shared.

But just to go over it real quickly. We see exactly the same, well let me actually stop short. Verse 23 then says in Genesis 2, And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Here's the picture of the exchanged life that we have with Jesus. Becoming one with Him.

Being His body, Him being the head, and as a result to produce fruit. That is our created purpose. In Ephesians 5 verse 28, it makes it very clear here what the Lord has really done, drawing a picture for us of the church and the bride.

Let's start in verse 30. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.

This is the great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. The whole institution of the marriage is to give us an analogy and a picture of the kind of love relationship, the kind of fruitfulness that God desires with His people. Turn back with me to Genesis 1.27. And here is the first command given in the Garden.

I want you to notice. Chapter 1 verse 28, Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it.

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over every living thing that moves on the earth. So God's desire for the bride of Christ is to be fruitful, for her womb to be fruitful. Turn with me to Psalms 1, and we'll see another picture of God's desire for His people.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper. Colossians 1, 9 and 10.

Again, just confirming God's desire, our created purpose as the bride of Jesus. Colossians 1, 9 and 10. And this is so typical of the whole heartbeat and prayers of the Apostle Paul, the one who established and planted so many churches.

This is the thing that he longed for. For this reason we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him. What fully pleases Him? Being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Knowing God and being fruitful. If any of you are familiar with the picture of Sarah and Abraham, do you remember when the son of promise was born? The Scripture says that Abraham knew Sarah and she conceived Isaac. Same picture here.

We are called into a relationship of intimacy, of love and deep consecration to the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we fulfill that, we are to have a fruitful womb. We are to produce the character of holiness and godliness in our lives and in those lives who we touch.

Those who are lost and needy around us. Amen. Romans 7, verse 4, my last verse to establish this fact.

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, to Him, speaking of Jesus, who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. This is one of our primary purposes, folks, is to be fruitful. So now we need to ask ourselves, are we fruitful? Do we have fruit? Is the fruit of godliness and righteousness being a testimony in our homes, our workplaces, our cities, our communities, our nation? You know, it's a funny thing about fruit.

You can't hide it. I don't know if you all noticed, but when Christine was singing up here, there's fruit there. And I'll tell you, you can't hide it where there's fruit.

And many of us have deceived ourselves at times, believing that we have a fruitful life, but there is nothing to see, folks. If you see a fruit-laden tree, the branches hang low in humility. But where there is no fruit, it's quite obvious.

There's a drastic difference with a tree that has fruit and a tree that doesn't. A true bride longs to bring forth fruit that bears the image of her husband and lover, for heirs that will carry on His name. Boy, doesn't every father want a son that will bear His name, that will carry on a name and perpetuate that lineage? It's exactly the same with God.

This is how He receives glory, children that bear His name. Let me give you an illustration of the kind of desire we should have to be fruitful. I was watching a documentary on PBS on the salmon the other day when I was working on some of this material.

And I was quite familiar with the story of the salmon swimming upstream, but suddenly it struck me in a whole new way that these simple fish that have no ability to reason will come from the ocean up these rivers and streams laying down their very life to get back to the place where they were born to reproduce after their own kind. They will tackle all kinds of odds and every kind of imaginable obstacle just to be fruitful. They will die doing it.

Their desire to give forth life and fruit is stronger than the desire to live. Folks, as we're walking in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that personifies, that exemplifies the Christian life. Do we have that character about us? That we would produce fruit after our own kind in the image of Jesus Christ? That we would walk before this world in a holy and godly way giving God glory? That's how He gets it.

As we walk in a Christ-like character of love and meekness, humility and purity, this is how He gets glory. Will we lay down our life? Will we take up our cross? Will we deny ourselves? Will we embrace death that that might be produced? Barrenness is a failure to fulfill our creative purpose. Barrenness is the inward incapacity to conceive or receive and nurture the seed that produces fruit.

It's a heart problem, folks. It's something deep in here that we can't touch. It's something that's wrong with our heart when we're barren.

And who of us hasn't experienced that? The frustration that knowing that there's something wrong with my heart and I can't touch it with my human efforts and human hands. I can't fix it. It humbles you.

It breaks you. Unless you adopt certain rationales, certain rationales, certain justifications that ease your conscience. This is so important when we need to keep the Word of God before us as a mirror, as a light to our way.

It shows us what we are supposed to be and who we actually are. If we neglect this Word and God's laws and ways, we forget. We adjust our circumstances or our theology to our circumstances.

This is epidemic in the church today. We, the church, the bride of Christ, are barren. Our womb is dry and parched.

We are needing of healing, a touch of God's revival power. Barrenness is a reproach. It's a consistent theme throughout all the Scripture.

To be barren is a shame. And this is a strange phenomenon. This, if anything, shows how deceived the church in America has become.

This has to be one of the areas. We are so barren and yet we are content to be that way. We are defying the natural, supernatural principles that we are created in.

And an example of that is one of the old Jewish writings. It basically said this, He who is without children is like one who is dead. Does that, our fruitlessness, does it break our hearts like that? The main meanings of barrenness is lacking meaning, lacking purpose, lacking creativity.

There's not a reason for being. Boy, that's a good way. Check your heart.

Check your life. Do you sense a lack of reason, of purpose, that there is just an emptiness in your life? Turn with me to Genesis 30 verse 1. Now when Rachel saw that she bore no children, Rachel envied her sister and said to Jacob, Give me children or else I die. Folks, this is really, right here in this area, is really the meat of the whole message.

And this is something that God has really been convicting my heart over. I've been trying to recognize my own barrenness. But you know, it just doesn't happen in a moment.

You understand the depth of the problem here. These are things that need to be studied. You know, the Scripture exhorts us to study the fear of the Lord.

Many things are lacking in our lives. We lack understanding and wisdom because we are not good students. And this area of the reproach of barrenness needs to be studied.

And this has been one of my heart cries lately. God, convict me. Show me how barren I am and let me sense the reproach, the shame of being barren.

And again, this is that thing that makes you recognize that you in your own strength cannot fix this thing. It is too deep. It's too big of an obstacle.

Rachel preferred death over her own barrenness. Many great men in church history have taken this as their prayer. The famous reformer, Scottish reformer John Knox said, give me Scotland or I die.

That was his prayer. Bloody Mary, the Queen of Scots, was so fearful of not, she said, the greatest army of the world, but of the prayers of John Knox. He was a man consumed with a vision for his country to have an outpouring of the Spirit, for the church to be established in purity and righteousness.

And it broke his heart. And he came to this place like Rachel where it said, Lord, nothing else matters but that You be glorified, that fruitfulness be established, that purity, holiness be established in Your church. And God, if I can't have it, let me die.

John Hyde, or as he's known, Prang Hyde, the famous missionary to India, said, God, give me souls or I die. He claimed one a day, then two a day, then three a day, then four a day. And if he couldn't meet what he felt God had laid on his heart, he was burdened and broken.

The man gave himself to fasting and prayer. He, in fact, didn't ever hardly attend the meetings in the great revival in India at the turn of the century. He locked himself up to prayer.

And there in those places, after long seasons of prayer and fasting, he developed a heart condition. He went to the doctor and his heart, from the travail of prayer, had moved from the left side to the right side. The doctor said, what have you done to yourself? What have you been doing? He said, well, I don't sleep much and I pray a lot.

I eat very little. The doctor said, if you don't stop this immediately, you're going to die. He said, so be it.

He continued to pray and paid the price, I might add. Folks, this is the spirit that we need in the church of Jesus Christ today. I am the first to say I am lacking this kind of travail.

Hannah was another barren woman with an intense desire to lay hold of God. Turn with me to 1 Samuel 1, 6-20. And her rival also provoked her severely to make her miserable because the Lord had closed her womb.

So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord that she provoked her. Therefore, she wept and did not eat. You'll notice, almost every one of these barren women in the Old Testament had, if you will, their own sand ballot.

One that came alongside and provoked and reproved them and mocked them and scorned them. And even in God's wisdom, He somehow uses this to increase the burden, intensify it. So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord that she was provoked, provoked her there, and she wept and did not eat.

She wept and did not eat. This is the characteristic of one who understands the reproach of barrenness. Let's continue.

Then Elkanah, her husband, said to her, Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Her heart was grieved. Am I not better to you than ten sons? See folks, let me just comment here on the phenomenon of barrenness. Everything else, we can be walking in all kinds of other blessings.

God can be providing lots of our needs and blessing our families and doing a lot of other things. But because this is a created purpose, this is a thing that God has designed in us, it doesn't matter what else we have. If we still do not recognize or sense the fruitfulness of God flowing through us, we're not content.

God's made us this way. People will try to console you, try to comfort you and say, it's okay. Look at all these other things that are going alright.

Don't be so discouraged. Folks, there's a lot of people that are repelled from this message of bearing the reproach of Jesus on our heart, the reproach of our own fruitlessness. They said, come on, don't get so carried away.

Well, I want to tell you, where is the need today? Is the church running over? Is there an epidemic of mourners and weepers over our sad state of affairs? No. This isn't the problem. We have the greatest need of these kind of things.

But I guarantee you, you set your face to prayer with a broken heart, grieving over your own barrenness and everybody will come out of the woodwork to try to get you up off your knees. So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the Lord and she was in bitterness of soul.

Another aspect. And prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. This is how you know if you're really sensing your own reproach of being barren.

Then she made a vow and said, O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction... She was afflicted. The affliction of Your maidservant and remember me and not forget Your maidservant, but will

give Your maidservant a man child. Then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall come upon his head.

And it happened as she continued praying before the Lord that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart. Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.

Therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. You know what this reminds me of? The second chapter of Acts. You get filled with the Holy Ghost, you start tearing, you start travailing, bearing the reproach of your own barrenness.

And people are going to think you're drunk and half crazy. They will. Verse 14, So Eli said to her, How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you.

But Hannah answered and said, Now, my Lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. She has more adjectives, more ways to explain her brokenness than in any other place in the Scripture that I've seen. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord.

Or she is drunk with God's Spirit in his heart. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken unto men. Here is the picture of what it is like.

Here is a picture of how these Old Testament women, they could not bear the thought of not bringing forth fruit. And folks, this is my challenge to myself and to you. Do we have this kind of heart within us? What is the remedy for our barrenness? How will we find God's reviving fruitful power? Let's talk about it.

First, we'll talk about where it's not found. There's a lot of confusion. And I don't know exactly where you all are coming from.

This can be a sticky subject for some, but I'll just make my way through it. The Old Testament women had a good concept. It's many times mentioned in the Old Testament about God closing and opening the womb.

They understood what the sovereignty of God was all about. But I'll tell you, today there's a lot of talk when it's talking about healing the barrenness of the church and the need for revival. The word sovereignty is being connected quite often.

And I'm very concerned that a great error is being perpetuated this way because our fatalism, our apathy, our irresponsibility often cloaks itself under the title of trusting in God's sovereignty. This is not... This is not... In every age when God challenges His people to revival, He always appeals and presses the responsibility of each man and believer. The issue of sovereignty is not brought up, and I challenge you to show me in the Scriptures where the subject is connected.

In hindsight, as they looked back, they saw the sovereignty of God. But in the time of need, when things were darkest, God appealed to their conscience, their responsibility, for them to repent, for them to humble, and them to pray. 2 Chronicles 7.14 is one of the best examples.

We don't even need to turn there. If My people who are called by My name shall turn from their wicked ways, humble themselves, and pray. If My people.

That is the prerequisite to revival. That's how God appeals to our hearts. And I'll tell you folks, I know the source of where this doctrine has been perpetuated.

I've read the books by the Calvinists that teach on revival, and always connect the issue of revival with it, with the issue of sovereignty. And folks, they use human reason to explain this. Circumstances, and not the Scriptures.

Am I denying the subject or the doctrine of the sovereignty of God? No. It is a biblical, sound concept. As I was discussing with Brad Yarbrough just the other day, these things are precious as we look back on the plan of God.

We see His sovereign hand in midst of suffering. It's good to understand the sovereignty of God. But in a day when sin is running rampant and the church is lazy and barren, that's not the time to be throwing these terms around.

Well, some will say and complain, well, we need to understand that God is the one that does it, and not us. And they're right. They're right.

But see, the prescriptions for revival in the Scriptures always call for two things. Humility, and repentance, and prayer. It's coming, falling before the God and saying, Lord, I'm a mess.

I'm willing to change if You do it. I pray and cry out to You. That doesn't sound like a big human effort to change things other than just acknowledging our sin and having a willingness to let Him do something about it.

So this is one of the first false remedies of barrenness. You'll note that these women were not content to say every example. Rachel, Hannah, Rebecca, Sarah, these women did not throw this term around in respect or in the context of their own barrenness.

They didn't say, well, if God is sovereign, if He opens the womb, it's opened, and if it's closed, it's closed. Or we know that I can't do anything about my barrenness. God is sovereign.

These were not the words that you found on these precious women's lips. But they are the words that we're using today in the context of revival. They were not content to just glibly quote scriptural principles or concepts.

They were heartbroken over their state of affairs. It was a created purpose. They couldn't help but agonize about it.

The next method is the man-centered methods. We have the two extremes. One, the sovereignty of God, irresponsibility cloaked in it.

The other, this scheming, striving, sweating arm of the flesh that we see on every side in the church today. That if you get a powerful enough PA system, enough bright lights and nice clothes, and enough TV cameras, there's something that's bound to happen. You know, if you pump enough money through it, surely God's going to do it.

Folks, money is not going to bring revival. We can get a hundred thousand satellites over this earth, and it's not going to bring revival. We don't need to send stuff up.

The only thing we need to send up is prayer, folks. Not to say that these things have their purpose and use, but this isn't the way. This is striving so many times.

Let's look at the concept. Genesis 16 Now Sarah, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarah said to Abraham, See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children.

Please go to my maid. Perhaps I shall obtain children by her. And Abraham, this is one time when a husband should not have listened to his wife.

And Abraham heeded the voice of Sarah. And we've all been suffering for it ever since. You know what's interesting though? God in His mercy made provision for Ishmael and Hagar.

He is a merciful God. But Ishmael is not the son of promise. Ishmael was not the son which God perpetuated His name and brought glory to Himself through.

Genesis 30, verse 3. We'll see another incident. Speaking of Rachel here, I'll start in verse 1. Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister. And let me just make a comment here.

Do you know what? And throughout the history of revival, as men heard the sound of rain in another country. Let me give you an example. In 1904, the Welsh revival was poured out in a mighty way.

Well, there was a little Canadian missionary in China by the name of Jonathan Goforth who had up to that time had a very successful ministry. But when he heard the news of revival in Wales, he envied the fruit of his brothers over there. Just like Rachel envied the fruit of her, of this other woman's womb.

In that same century, a little Indian lady by the name of Pandita Ramabi who tended to orphans and widows, heard the reports of the revival in Wales. She envied the fruit, the revival power there. And she set herself to praying.

Frank Bartleman in the zoos of California heard the reports and envied the fruit. As a result, these men recognized that God was doing something. They were reminded of the purposes of God and set themselves to pray.

They didn't take any shortcuts, but God honored their prayer too. So, folks, as we hear the reports of God doing things, we should be moved to pray. Folks, as we've heard the reports of what God's been doing here has provoked us in other places to pray.

And Jacob's... Let me read this verse again. Now, when Rachel saw that she bore no children, Rachel envied her sister and said to Jacob, give me children or else I die. And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel.

And he said, am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of your womb? So she said, here is my maid, Beliah. Go into her and she will bear you a child on my knees that I also may have good children by her. Then she gave him... Well, she gave him Bilhah, her maid, as a wife.

And Jacob went into her and she conceived him, bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, God has judged my case and He has also heard my voice and given me a son. Therefore, she called his name Dan, which literally means God has judged.

And Rachel's maid conceived him again, bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, with great wrestling I have wrestled with my sister and indeed I have prevailed. So she called his name Naphtali.

Verse 22. Then God remembered Rachel. This is the first time you see this term.

And God listened to her and opened her womb. This was not said about any of the other two children. And she conceived and bore a son and said, God has taken away my reproach.

So she called his name Joseph and said, the Lord shall add to me another son. Let's look real quickly at Genesis 49. And what we see here is a prophecy about the sons here born to Rachel.

And I want to make the comment again, Dan and Naphtali were heirs, but in God and His mercy, He worked with them. But I'll tell you, there is a sharp contrast between these two tribes, these two men that represent tribes, and Joseph. And we'll see that real quickly.

Verse 16. Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heel.

I don't know about you, but I don't think I'd want somebody prophesying that over me. Naphtali is a deer let loose. Verse 21.

He uses beautiful words. Remember, Naphtali means to wrestle. A lot of striving, a lot of wrestling in the church is using something that's running around like a deer that uses beautiful words, but doesn't have a lot else to offer.

This is too impressive as it strikes me. Joseph is a fruitful bough. Here's where the fruit is, folks.

A fruitful bough by a well. His branches run over the wall. The arches have bitterly grieved Him, shot at Him and hated Him, but His bough remained in strength.

Doesn't that sound like Psalms 1 that we looked at? And the arms of His hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. From there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. By the God of your Father who will help you and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessing of heaven above.

That's where we need the blessing, folks. Blessing of the deep that lies beneath. Blessing of the breast and of the womb.

The blessings of your fathers have exceeded the blessings of my ancestors. Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills, they shall be on the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers. You see the difference? Joseph is the Holy One.

He is separate from his brothers. He is sanctified, set apart to bring forth the Messiah, the real fruit. How many verses are given to Joseph in comparison to these other men? The difference is they are the fruit of man's striving, sweating efforts.

And Joseph is the fruit of God. What is God's remedy for bareness? We've seen the two wrong ways to do it. Let's look at how God wants us to do it.

Hebrews 11.11 We're all familiar with chapter 11 of Hebrews. It's the hall of faith. The great exploits of the patriarchs.

Verse 11, By faith, Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore, from one man and him

as good as dead, impossible odds, impossible circumstances, were born as many as the stars of the sky and multitude innumerable as the sands which are by the seashore. That sounds like some fruit.

How did she do it? By faith in Jesus. Let me just make the statement that there is a lot of teaching today on disciplines, on how to be free from all kinds of sins and different problems in the church. And what is prescribed? What is prescribed? Lists of disciplines.

Folks, if the bottom line isn't faith in Jesus Christ, it's another gospel. It's faith in Christ. Why is it another gospel? Because Jesus doesn't get the glory.

Jesus doesn't get the glory. You know, I love to share on prayer, but I'll be quick to say, brother, you're not going to get free from maybe that immorality or that sin, whatever it may be, by prayer and Bible study. This is only the platform, prayer and Bible study, as good as it is, where faith is nurtured.

See, some people will say little chanting prayers over and over and read verses religiously, and they don't understand the principle of their faith being nurtured. And this being a platform to trust more in Jesus. Folks, the false religions have done it for years.

They didn't understand that it was by faith in Christ. This is the sad story of the church of the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church. They did not understand this principle, and they applied themselves to all kinds of rituals and prayers and spinning beads and reading verses, but they did not come into true godliness and were not a fruitful bow for Jesus Christ.

They did not understand that it was by faith in Jesus. Now, when I'm talking about faith, I'm not talking about giving mental assent. I'm not talking about some passive, intangible thing that you cannot see.

I'm talking about the kind of active, vibrant, radical faith that the Scripture talks about. Faith employs radical prayer. That's faith's first option.

It always cries out to God. Faith, in Mark 2.4, tears the roof off the house to get near to Jesus. In Mark 10.47, faith defies crowds of opposition.

In Matthew 9.20, faith risks life and reputation. Faith will do whatever it takes to get near to Christ, to petition Christ, to cling to, rely and adhere on Jesus. Folks, there's an epidemic running through the church right now, and that is we have forgotten that Christ is preeminent, that He receives all the glory, that we point to Jesus at every turn, that His name should be upon our lips, that we glorify the cross and the empty tomb.

Jesus is the way. It's not a bunch of other things plus Christ. The bottom line is Jesus.

We need to exalt the preeminence of Jesus, the promises of Jesus. What does faith do? It prays to Jesus. We don't give a lot of attention to the Holy Spirit over Christ.

No, Christ takes preeminence because the Holy Spirit's job is to glorify Christ. Amen. And if you haven't read in a while, I saw back there on your track table A Christless Pentecost by David Wilkerson.

Boy, that track ought to be read every year. It is so precious. So faith's first choice is to employ radical prayer.

And this is what I want to show you. The nature of barrenness demands urgent prayer. Remember, we talked about that it wasn't a total sovereign work of God without any of our participation.

And at the same time, it wasn't the striving and sweating, but we already have affirmed and recognized that this barrenness is an inward problem that we cannot touch. And this is what humbles us and brings us to our knees in prayer. This is what every one of these barren women did.

So what we're talking about is this middle ground. We know that God is the one that does it, but at the same time, and we know that our striving will not accomplish it, but at the same time, we hold this middle ground bearing the reproach of our barrenness on our heart and continually crying out to God. This is a hard ground to hold, folks.

And a lot of people get tired. You start crying out to God. You have a vision from the Scriptures what the church is really supposed to be like.

And it breaks your heart every time you see what the church in America is like. And what happens is people get weary in the church and they adopt a new concept. They adjust the scriptural concept of the church.

They say, well, that was a cultural thing is why they did some of those things. They explain away the beautiful picture that we see of the church of Jesus Christ in the Scripture. And it no longer breaks their heart.

They no longer sense reproach because suddenly now their church fits into their new theology. We've got to hold that middle ground, that reproach. We don't cast off responsibility by saying it's the sovereignty of God.

And we don't set ourselves to striving in man-made schemes. We ask God, Lord, enhance the reproach of my own barrenness. Show me my need.

And then set yourself to praying and pray more and pray more and pray more. What does Luke 18 teach us? That the widow was persistent. She slept on the judge's doorstep.

She would not let him go. What does the parable about Bartimaeus teach us? Son of David, have mercy on me. His own brothers, the disciples tried to keep him back from getting ahold of Jesus.

And he cried out all the more. Cry out and cry out and cry out. Don't deny the reality of our own barrenness and continue to cry out to God.

It's the only prescription given in Scripture. Let's look at these precious women. Well, real quickly, we'll go over Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, all these women.

As references to Rebekah, I'll give you real quick. Genesis 25-21. Rachel, Genesis 30, 22-24.

Hannah we already looked at. 1 Samuel 1, 6-20. And then look with me at Elizabeth.

In Luke 1, verse 13. But the angel said to him, speaking of Zacharias, do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard. And your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

What was the thing that took care of their barrenness? It was the prayer. What took care of Hannah's barrenness? It was the prayer. It was trusting Jesus by simply crying, calling out to Him.

Look with me at Joel 1, 13 and 20. Folks, if you want to study more about this concept, just eat up the whole book of Joel. That's what is a major theme.

God's people turning their back on God. The physical barren had to come into the land to convict them of their inward barrenness and then self-applying themselves to prayer to receive reviving, refreshing... ..of Israel at this time. Actually, the vine was cut off, the fruit of the vine, the grain and the oil.

These were the elementary things needed for the priest to offer sacrifice in the temple. And because of the barrenness, the priest did not have the resources to offer the sacrifices that were required. Isn't that stated in the church today? As priests in the church of Jesus Christ today, we need the oil of the Holy Spirit.

We need the grain of the true Word of God. And we need the fruit of the vine, the blessed revelation of Jesus Christ. But as a result of our own stubbornness and idolatry, these resources are actually being cut off to get our attention.

Why do you think our country is in the state it is? Hey folks, the answer isn't in the White House. It's at the church house. We've got to really turn our hearts to the Lord.

Be ashamed, you farmers. Wail, you vine dressers, for the weed and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up and the fig tree has withered.

The pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, all the trees of the field are withered. Surely joy, joy has withered away from the sons of men. Isn't this one of the greatest things that the modern church is chasing after? We want joy in our meetings.

And we're trying to take a shortcut. We'll do anything to make our meetings entertaining and lively. The only path to true godly joy is to be found on our knees through repentance and revival.

Here's the answer. Verse 13, Gird yourselves and lament, you priests. Wail, you who minister before the altar.

Come lie all night in sackcloth. You who minister to my God for your grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast.

Call a sacred assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of your Lord God and cry out to the Lord. Here's the answer for our barrenness.

Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is at hand. It shall come as destruction from the Almighty. It is not the food to cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God.

The seed shrivels under the clouds. Cloths and storehouses are in shambles. Barns are broken down for the grain has withered.

How the animals grown and herds of cattle are restless because they have no pasture. Even the flocks of the sheep suffer punishment. Folks, people are wandering to and fro.

They can't even find a place, a safe place, a sanctuary to be fed the Word of Jesus. And you know what's worse of all? It's the children in our own households are suffering because of the barrenness of the church of Jesus. The little lambs of the pasture are suffering and going without.

They are not seeing the fruitfulness of Jesus in the church. They are not experiencing the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, the miracle work of the Holy Spirit. Our sons and our daughters need to see this so they'll know that there is only one God.

We need to cry out and pray to God that He would save our children, that He would preserve them from the barrenness and the plague. Joel 2.15-19, we see the answer also. Blow the trumpet in Zion.

Consecrate a fast. Call a sacred assembly. Gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation. Assemble the elders. The language is the same.

Gather the children and nursing babes. No one is to be left out. Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing.

What is happening here? Do you remember in the passages, what characterized the last days? That they will be given in marriage and be marrying. Things are going on as usual. People are letting their life go on.

What is the call for here? Stop. Let it stop. Put away the normal things that you've been trying to do.

There's a time when we shut it down. But God help us, the church has to consistently go on. We couldn't stop a normal Sunday service.

We can't put an end to Sunday school right now. We can't take out to have one service to pray and fast. People expect this.

And the church goes on and on and on. And as a result, we're barren and barren and barren. We choose the same dry methods and accomplish nothing.

We need to heed the example of the Scripture. Stop. Blow the trumpet.

Let the elders come. Let the people come. Pray.

God help us. God, we can't even... They won't stop anything. The educational program has to go on.

Oh, we couldn't do without that. The children have to sing this morning. We have to have a children's program.

We've planned it four months in advance. It doesn't matter if the church is dead and dry. Folks, we are sick.

We're barren. The womb is dry. We don't even realize how dry it is.

God was convicting me of this this week. I don't even recognize how bad things are. I am more deceived than I know.

There is hope. The most barren wounds became the most fruitful. Sarah, beyond any possibility, produced fruit.

Rachel, Rebecca, Samson's mother. Elizabeth, an old woman, produced the one who would go before Jesus Christ and sound the alarm. So our barrenness is a source of reproach and should cause us to grieve and pray.

But at the same time, we need to understand the principle that God delights to use impossible situations.

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