

The wilderness and dry land will be joyously glad! The desert will blossom like a rose and rejoice! Every dry and barren place will burst forth with abundant blossoms, dancing and spinning with delight! Lebanon's lush splendor covers it, the magnificent beauty of Carmel and Sharon... Yahweh's ransomed ones will return with glee to Zion. They will enter with a song of rejoicing and be crowned with everlasting joy. Ecstatic joy will overwhelm them; weariness and grief will disappear!

ISAIAH 35:1-2, 10

The Desert Will Bloom

Big Idea

The Sahara Desert surrounds the Nile. It is so vast that its width is almost double that of the Atlantic Ocean. Its land mass is larger than the 48 contiguous United States combined. Survival is dependent on finding a source of water and protecting oneself from heatstroke.

Despite the scorching heat, life in the desert is plentiful. Scientists have identified 500 species of plants and more than 70 types of mammals who make the Sahara their home. Humans have dwelt in the Sahara for all of history.

Or consider Death Valley in California, which experiences average temperatures of 120-140 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. According to the National Park Service, Death Valley is well known for being the "hottest, driest, and lowest National Park in the United States." Yet, even in this stark landscape and extreme environment, life is possible. God causes the desert to bloom in what seems like an impossible scenario. Latent seeds buried beneath the surface transform Death Valley into a sea of wildflowers. The seeds simultaneously spring forth blossoms in the botanical phenomenon known as the superbloom; a spontaneous combustion of life, color and beauty in an otherwise dead-looking land.

The harsh desert conditions of our life can seem to stretch for miles and last for years. It is easy to lose hope when all we seem to be doing is wandering in circles. Survival becomes our only focus, and we might not be doing a lot of planting or watering.

Sometimes storms or torrential rains will relentlessly beat us and cause destruction or devastation. Other times, we might find ourselves suffocating under the stifling heat of an unforgiving dry spell. It is in these desperate moments, when all hope seems lost, that we have to hold on to the promises of God.

To the natural eye, a desert appears to be void of life and growth. Yet God promises in the book of Isaiah that He will cause the wastelands to bloom. "The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing." (Isaiah 51:3 NIV)

The Biblical Zion was a physical space, and was considered a spiritual structure. It is a city--the City of David to be specific--located on the top of a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem. Regarded as the future eternal Jerusalem, it carries spiritual significance as the City of our God where Christ establishes His rule on earth.

Christians today understand that Zion is the home we build for Jesus in our hearts when we believe in Him, walk obediently, and live righteously. When we read in Isaiah that the Lord will surely comfort Zion, we know He is talking about us, our hearts, our ruins, our wilderness, and that He is promising to make our wastelands into His garden. God will cause your deserts to bloom!

Think about a dream you have given up on, perhaps a business you tried to start which failed, a book you wrote that was a flop. Maybe you know a loved one who once walked with the Lord and now seems hopelessly lost. Imagine the situation or person as a seed. While holding it in your hand, nothing on the surface of a seed indicates life or growth, just as a desert is not a place you would imagine to find life.

Although seeds appear lifeless, they are just dormant. They are typically in a resting state, requiring very little resources to stay alive while performing functions at the cellular level, even though we are not able to perceive it. Once placed in the appropriate conditions to grow, our natural eye can begin to perceive the life that has always been inside.

God is the maker of appropriate conditions! All of this can happen, but not if we keep holding it in OUR hand. We have to let go of it, plant it, and trust God with it. Only then can we witness its growth and the fruit that can come of it. Most seeds aren't very beautiful. In fact, they're quite the contrary. Small, dull, unimpressive and unpromising.

When a gardener looks at a seed, he sees beyond its physical attributes--or lack thereof. He sees the fruit or flower that is to come. Likewise, the Master Gardener looks beyond our present state and sees the full potential in every aspect of our lives.

There is an unusual shrub found in the American southwest called the Texas Mountain Laurel (Sophra Secundiflora). The seedpods of this shrub are some of the ugliest seeds in the world. They are taupe in color, and resemble peanut pods as they hang fromthe shrub. After some time, those dangling groups of pods turn from taupe to black. If you were unfamiliar with this flowering shrub, you would likely trim off the black pods believing them to be dying parts of the tree. However, every March, amazingly, the black pods bloom with rich clusters of a delicate purple-colored flower.

Thankfully, our Master Gardener knows what a seed will produce, and doesn't regard the "black" stages as worthless. In fact He uses them to prepare the bloom which comes later. Could we, as imitators and followers of Christ regard others in the same way? When we look at others on this journey, could we bolster them through the "taupe and black" stages they go through, resulting in the privilege of being witnesses of the lush purple blooms that follow these difficult stages of transformation?

God is the life-bringer. He has a plan for every seed and every desert season. His incredible design has always been for seeds to bring forth life. Whether the seed involves humanity, zoology or botany, every seed has life-potential. He also brings life to every desert. No matter what harsh conditions we find ourselves in, we can anticipate that we will reap a harvest. Whether we planted and watered the seeds or not, God is able to cause the desert to bloom, still what greater joy we are poised to experience when we participate in this process!

In his poem "If You Will" A.D. Burkett wrote:

"If God can make - of an ugly seed with a bit of earth and air, and dew and rain, sunshine and shade -

a flower so wondrous fair....

I wonder what He makes of a soul like me. "

Discussion

Discuss which seeds (old dreams, loved ones away from God) in your life appear to be buried in a desert situation. What could happen with these seeds in the future?
What kind of involvement and participation is required by you in order for the seed to germinate and bloom?
What position and/or actions should we take while waiting on a dream to be fulfilled by the Master Gardener?

Takeaway

Don't lose heart, friend. God is at work. Believe that He is taking all of these severe conditions and curating the perfect environment to cause a superbloom to occur. The dead, dry seeds beneath the desert floor burst open all at once and produce a dramatic display of unimaginably beautiful color so rich and vivid that it can be seen from outer space. When we put our trust fully in God's plan and timing, He brings life to the desert. Joy, gladness, and hope are restored, and He promises that you will be comforted. Everlasting joy will crown your head, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

