

# The Beautiful Feet

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[ 0 : 00 ] Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion. Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. For there shall no more come into you, the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Shake yourself from the dust and arise. Be seated, O Jerusalem. Loose the bonds from your neck, O city and daughter of Zion. For thus says the Lord, You were sold for nothing, you shall be redeemed without money.

For thus says the Lord God, My people went down at the first into Egypt to seduce them there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. Now therefore, what have I here, declares the Lord, seeing that my people are taken away for nothing?

Their rulers wail, declares the Lord, and continually all the day my name is despised. Therefore, my people shall know my name. Therefore, in that day they shall know that it is I who speak.

Here I am. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns.

[ 1 : 15 ] The voice of your watchmen, they lift up their voice. Together they sing for joy. For eye to eye they see The return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, You waste places of Jerusalem.

For the Lord has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm Before the eyes of all the nations. And all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God.

That aria of Handel's is really one of the loveliest in the Messiah. How beautiful are the feet.

Although you might think it rather odd, I suppose, to write a song in praise of feet. But of course it's poetic imagery, isn't it? It's really not the feet themselves that are beautiful, But it's the news that are brought by those running feet.

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel. That is the good news of peace. And bring glad tidings of good things.

[ 2 : 26 ] Sometimes the news that a messenger brings Is just so wonderful That it actually makes everything about that messenger Radiate with beauty.

Just because they deliver something that is so beautiful. A long time ago in my former life, When I used to work as a doctor, I remember vividly one night working in the coronary care unit.

And a man had come in with a very bad heart attack. Had had several cardiac arrests. And I'd just finished putting in an emergency pacemaker Into his heart.

And I got him stabilized. And I came out into the waiting room To speak to his wife who was waiting And was beside herself with anxiety. I walked around and walked in And just saw her sitting there.

And all I said were these words, He's going to be fine. And she jumped up out of her chair, Put her arms around my neck, And kissed me. And that was simply because The news that I brought her Made everything about me absolutely beautiful.

[ 3 : 28 ] So good was that news. Must have been pretty good news, Wasn't it? But that's why this messenger here in this passage Is so beautiful.

Even his feet. Even his dirty, sweaty, running feet. Because he brings the greatest news possible. The words that Handel uses In the libretto of the Messiah, They come from the apostle Paul, As he quotes them in the book of Romans.

But he's quoting from an Old Testament prophet, From the prophet Isaiah. And from the passage that you have Right in front of you in the programs. If you open the middle pages, You'll see there, It's from chapter 52, And verse 7.

And you can see the good news That's there. The word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament Is the word gospel.

That's where we get our word from. It's a gospel of peace, Of happiness, Of salvation, Which is the reign of your God, The God of Israel.

[ 4 : 34 ] And that's why, Why the watchmen are breaking forth Into that song of joy That we were singing, Just as our choir sang a moment ago. Because, Straight after hearing the news Of these beautiful feet, The runner who brings this news, That they're overwhelmed with joy.

Because, They see afar off That that good news is coming. From their high vantage point, On the ramparts of the city, They can see, Before everybody else can see, And they have a sense, Of what this messenger brings, And the news, And its significance, For all of the people.

But why is it that these watchmen, Should be so eagerly scanning the horizon, For news, For news that will bring peace, For news that will bring happiness? Presumably because, There was a lack of those things, In their city and in their land, Perhaps because they were, Desperately longing for them, To return, To come back.

Well, What's going on? What is the distress that they're in? What is it that they, They see coming, To bring an answer to that distress, To bring joy, And happiness instead?

Well, We need to look, A little bit more, At the verses that surround that verse, In order to see, Two things, That the watchmen see, And understand.

[ 5 : 56 ] First, And this accounts for their, Their watching with longing. First, First, They see a woeful reality. These watchmen see the woeful reality, Of a society, And of a world, That has rejected, The rule of God, Its maker.

Look at verses 3 to 5, Of chapter 52, There on the right hand side. See, They, They knew that they were, A captive people. As lad's words here, Are addressed to a people, Who were, In captivity, In Babylon.

They first spoke these words, Long before that captivity, Actually happened. But, His words spoke so powerfully, To those people, Already now, In captivity, Precisely because, He had predicted, Exactly what was going to befall them.

And now, They were a people, Really at rock bottom. They were, They were beleaguered, They were in absolute despair. And of course, When, When people are in the pit of despair, They often, They often look back, At their whole life, Don't they?

And feel nothing but worthlessness. They see everything, In the light of their, Their current circumstances. And that was exactly, The situation here, For the people of Israel.

[ 7 : 14 ] They see their whole history, In the light of that present misery. One, Long story, Of captivity, And worthlessness. Long ago, If you look in verse 4, It was in Egypt, You see?

They were sold, Into slavery, In Egypt. Then more recently, Still verse 4, They were oppressed, By the, The Assyrian nation, Their northern neighbors. And now, Verse 5, They were sold away, For nothing, And this time, It was captivity, Into Babylon.

They were taken away, For nothing. They were a worthless people, Not worth, A farthing. Not worth tuppence. That's how they felt. Verse 2, In the dust, And in neck irons, Oppressed, Verse 4, Even their rulers, Verse 5, Were wailing.

Such was the, The misery, Of the national situation. No wonder, They felt worthless. No wonder, They felt like, Absolutely nothing. And that sense of worthlessness, Brings terrible, Pain, Terrible psychological pain.

We know that. We see it sometimes, Sometimes in people, Perhaps, Some people that you know, Who have a dreadful sense, Of worthlessness. Because, Throughout their life, They face neglect, They face cruelty.

[ 8 : 37 ] Sometimes you see it, In a young person, Maybe a girl or a boy, Who, Who has desperate issues, Of self-esteem. Feelings of worthlessness. And often that's because, Their parents, Perhaps especially, Their father, Mentally abused them, All through their childhood.

Never gave them a word, Of encouragement. Never gave them a word, Of praise. And that's how they feel. I know a man, Some of you, Here also know him, Who, An Indian, Who grew up as a Dalit, One of the lowest class, In Indian society.

Despised, Rejected by his whole village. It drove him to utter despair, And he took his own life, On a number of occasions. It's a common story. But it can happen, Can't it? To a whole society, Even to a whole nation.

Just think of some of the, The nations that we know today, That are occupied, By war, That have been pulled apart, By civil war. It can be an enormous, Sense of despair, Of worthlessness. And that was Israel, Here, Reading these words, Of the prophet. They'd sunk so low, They'd lost all, Confidence, All sense of life, All sense, Of love.

[ 9 : 50 ] A sense of paralysis, Caused by these feelings, Of sheer worthlessness. And, That's perhaps not so far removed, From much of the real pain, Much of the, The paralysis, The worthlessness, That abounds, All over the world today, Many societies, Even in our own, Alas.

And that's why, It's so important, To see the root cause, Of that deep, Deep societal pain, That the prophet, Is speaking about here.

And Isaiah here, Is very, Very clear, Isn't he? Behind it all, Is the very real burden, Of something, That is far more concrete, Something, Far more objective, Than just a subjective feeling, Of worthlessness, And of pain.

Behind it, He is very clear, Lies the very real guilt, Of people, Who have actually been condemned, By God himself. It's God's anger, It's God's wrath, Against their rebellion, Against their rejection, Of his loving rule.

That is what, Ultimately, Explains their plight. Look on the left side there, In chapter 51, Verse 17, Wake up, Says the Lord, To his people.

[ 11 : 11 ] Wake up, He says to all the world, Wake up to the reality, That all of your deepest, Psychological problems, And your pain, Have a far deeper root, Than you realize.

It's a spiritual problem, And it's a huge one, At that, You have drunk, He says, From the hand of the Lord, The cup of his wrath.

And that's why, You're staggering, In despair, And in pain. That's why, Your society, He says, Is tottering, It's adrift. It's the rebuke of God, Look at the last line, Of verse 20, The rebuke, Of your God.

Now friends, I understand, That that's, Very unpalatable, To talk about. Very difficult, For the modern ear, To hear, But don't, Don't assume, That it was ever, Very palatable, To anybody. Of course it wasn't. Nobody ever, Ever, Ever liked, Hearing that all their problems, And all the world's problems, Are ultimately, Down to, Human beings' sin, And human beings' rejection, Of God.

[ 12 : 16 ] That's why, All the prophets, All through history, Coming to God's people, Were persecuted, Not fetted. That's why, Jesus himself, Was abused, And rejected, And crucified, Not celebrated.

Because his message, Was just exactly the same, As all of the prophets, What was his first word? Repent. Turn back, To God, Before it's too late.

The Lord Jesus Christ, Would absolutely, Undoubtedly, Have been banned, From Facebook, And from Twitter, Wouldn't he? If he was alive today. But no one's ever, Liked that message, Of course they haven't.

But, Here's the thing, That is the consistent message, Of the Bible, Of the Christian scriptures. That all our, Human strife, That all our, Angst, That all our, Pain, That all our, Broken relationships, That all our, Sorrows, Are ultimately, As a result, Of God's, Just, And right anger, At our, Outright rebellion, As human beings, Against, Our own maker, Against the one, Who made us, And who rules us.

Even here, Israel, Israel, God's, Chosen people, Who above all, Had absolutely no excuse, For their sin. But not just Israel. The whole world, Stands condemned, Before God.

[ 13 : 42 ] That's what Christ's apostle says. And that's the real heart, Friends, Of the cancer, In our human society today. Manifests in, In so many different ways, In our psyches, In our social problems, In our fears.

We live, So often, Don't we, These days, With fears, In so many ways. But it was just the same then. Look at verse 13 of chapter 51, On the left. We fear all the day. Well, that's true, isn't it? We fear for the economy. We fear for Brexit, And the Eurozone. We fear for our futures. We fear for our families. We fear for climate change, And the polar ice caps.

We fear our cholesterol levels. We fear cancer. We have a thousand other fears, Don't we, That stalk us, In our lives as human beings.

Including many irrational fears. Things that are out of all proportion to reality. Why? Well, because.

[14:45] Look at verse 13. Because you have forgotten the Lord, Your maker. It's ironic, isn't it? Look at verse 12. People, People refuse to fear God, Who made all things, And yet instead, They fear men who die, Who are just as frail as the grass.

We reject the loving rule of our maker, And then we willingly enslave ourselves, To the tyranny of the mere material. And our lives, In so many ways, Are enslaved by mere things.

And that's what these watchmen see, As they look out at their society. And that's, Still true today.

We see the woe for reality, Don't we, Of a society, And a world.

And it is because it has rejected, The rule of God, Its maker. And these watchmen, They see the consequences. We all see that.

But they also, Because they've listened to God's analysis, They also see the root cause. They see that underlying, Every other problem there is, In this world.

[16:00] From its broken ecosystem, To its broken economies, To its broken families, Every problem. They see that behind it all, Is the great problem.

Verse 17. It is the cup, Of, God's wrath. That's the condemnation, Of God, Upon, His creature's sin, And rebellion, Which is inexcusable.

And that's, That's what God's watchmen see then, So clearly. That's what God's prophets, Pointed out to his people, All the time, Down the ages, To see the reality, Of the world, As it really is.

And to see why it is, As it really is. And it's also why, There has always been, A deep, Deep yearning, In the hearts of people.

Always. For the answer, To this world's, Willful reality. A yearning, In hearts, In hearts, Weighed down, By ancient griefs, And centuries of sorrow, In hearts, That in the darkness hide, And in the shades of death, Abide.

[17:10] A yearning, For tomorrow. The watchman, Of Isaiah's time, Saw that, Woeful reality, Of a society, Of a world, That has, Rejected, Its maker, And therefore, Inflicted, Upon itself, This, Cup of God's, Wrath.

But, By God's great mercy, Now they've seen, Something else. They have seen, The answer, To all, Of this yearning.

They see, The wonderful revelation, Of a God, Who would not reject, The world, That he's made, Even though, It, Had so clearly, Rejected him.

Verse 7 there, Of chapter 52, On the right hand side, They see, The beautiful feet, Coming, And bringing, That wonderful news, At last. Good news, Of happiness, Of salvation, Of the present reign, Of God.

Look again, At the verses, That tell us, About Israel's fear, Israel's, Condemnation, Their sense of worthlessness, Chapter 51 there, Verse, Verse 12, You're afraid, Says God, Of mere men, Man who dies, But I, Am he who comforts you.

[18:37] Comfort, That's a great word, In Isaiah the prophet, It's the word, Isn't it, That begins, Handel's, Messiah, Comfort ye. Verse 13 there though, I the Lord, Who stretched out the heavens, Who laid the foundations, Of the whole earth, Verse 16, I have covered you, In the shadow of my hand, Say to Zion, You are my people, I, Have comforted you.

And that is, Good news, To end all fear, Including, And above all, The great fear of death, Look at verse 14, He who is bowed down, Shall be speedily released, He shall not die, And go down to the pit, An end to the fear of death itself, And, Verse 22, An end to all condemnation, To all God's wrath and anger, The God who pleads the cause, Of his own people, Says, Behold, I have taken from you, The cup of staggering, The bowl of my wrath, You will drink no more, No condemnation, For those, Who are his, And an end, To the terrible, Poverty of spirit, And despair, And worthlessness, Look at chapter, Chapter 52, Verse 1, On the right hand side, The beautiful garments, He's speaking of there, The garments of a bride,

Beloved, Of her husband, Who is God himself, And the place of a royal queen, Set on the throne,

Beside the king, No longer, Verse 2, No longer a humble captive, In bondage, You thought you

were nothing, Verse 3, You were sold for nothing, But in fact, God says, You my people, You are

beloved, You'll be on to any price, You'll be redeemed, Verse 3, Not by mere money, But by

something that is of far, Far greater worth, As the apostle Peter, Speaks about, Many hundreds of

years later, Redeemed, He says, By the precious blood, Of the son of God himself, Do you see why the watchmen are singing for joy?

That is the message, And they see that message coming at last, Into the world, Where there was condemnation, Where there was God's terrible wrath, There will be peace, With heaven, With God the judge, Where there was paralyzing fear, Instead there will be liberating salvation, And where there was deep, Deep pain, Where there was dejection, The people will break forth, Into happiness, And great, Great joy, How could that possibly be, When the situation around them, Was so woeful, So terrible, Well it's because they see, Because they've been given, A wonderful revelation by God, Of a God who will not, Reject the world, That he's made, Verse 8, Do you see they sing for joy, Because eye to eye, What do they see?

The return, Of the Lord, The king of heaven, To Zion, To his city, They see the Lord, Who doesn't reject his people forever, But is returning, Verse 9, Do you see to comfort his people, To redeem his people, And verse 10, To bring his salvation, Do you see, To the very ends, Of this whole world, To all the peoples, Of this sad, And soaring world, It's obvious, Isn't it, Just reading these verses, That Isaiah is talking about, Something far, Far greater, Than just a return, Of a captive people, From Babylon, To an earthly Jerusalem, The later chapters of Isaiah, Are absolutely plain, Read them, Read them later on, He's talking about, Something far more than that, He's talking about, Nothing less, Than the recreation, Of this whole universe, The breaking forth, Into joy, Of a whole new creation, Read on in Isaiah, To see,

[ 22 : 50 ] What that's like, It's the place, He says, Of everlasting joy, It's a place, It's a place, Where the oil of joy, Will replace, All mourning, And sadness, Where a beautiful, Headdress of life, Will fill the place, Where once, Death, So desperately, Reigned, And that's, That's what these watchmen saw, A revelation, Of the wonderful news, Of the coming kingdom, Of a king, Returning, The Lord himself, Coming back, To put things right, They see, Verse 8, Eye to eye, The return, Of the Lord, So he joyfully, Shared these glad tidings, With people who were walking, In deep darkness, Because they wanted to bring light, Peace, Joy, Hope, They wanted to pour, All of that, Into their troubled lives, Lived, On this mortal coil, And friends,

That's why we're gathered here, In this building tonight, That's why we're singing, And sharing the message of Christmas, Because those of us, Who are here tonight, Who are Christian people, We're like those watchmen, We've seen, What they saw, And yet we've seen it, So, So much more clearly, The return, Of the Lord God, To this world, We've seen it begin, At that first Christmas, In the coming of God himself, To Bethlehem, And to Nazareth, And we know, The wonderful comfort, That he brought, In the person of his son, The Lord Jesus, To the oppressed, To the broken, To the humble, Of this world, And that was just a foretaste, A brief snapshot, Of the wonderful joy, Of the everlasting joy, That he will bring, When he returns, To reign forever and ever, And we've seen it made certain, In the great redemption, In the bringing back, Out of bondage, And out of the captivity, To death itself, By our Lord Jesus Christ, Not with money, But with the infinite, Preciousness of his own blood, At Calvary, And we've seen it, Made certain, In his resurrection, From the grave, And his ascension, To glory, And we will see it, Made complete, Friends, For certain, When he returns forever, Our Lord Jesus, Has told us, Behold, I'm coming, And I'm coming soon, We've seen it, We who are Christians, We're like those watchmen, On the ramparts, But we know, Just like them, That inside the city, Our city, Our nation, There are people, There are countless people, Who have never yet heard, These glad tidings, Of great joy, And they don't know, What we know, And they're still yearning, They're still longing, Longing, Sometimes for what they don't, Really know, But know it or not, There is that deep yearning, That inconsolable longing, In hearts, That in the darkness hide, And in the shade of death, Abide, There is a yearning, And it is, Whether you know it or not, It is for the one, The only one, Who can, And who does, Bring glad tidings, Of good things, That will never, Ever disappoint, And we know him, We find him, The good news has come, In our Lord Jesus Christ, We want to share that with you, We want to share, With all who have not yet seen, And not yet heard, So that you can join us, In the extraordinary joy, That is in Jesus Christ, And that is why, The apostle Paul quotes, These words from Isaiah, And says, And how will they hear, Without someone, Proclaiming the message, That is why elsewhere, He commands all Christian people, To put on, He says, As shoes on your feet, The readiness, Given by, This good news, The gospel of peace, Look at that very last verse, On the right hand side there, Verse 10, Of chapter 52, That is a divine certainty, One day, All the ends of the earth, Shall see the salvation, Of our God, When Jesus Christ returns, To judge this whole world, Every eye will see him, Every eye will acknowledge him, Then, Even those who have despised him, And rejected him, And persisted in that, Until the last

day, But the Lord Jesus tells us, Those who do that, Will only see that salvation, From afar, From a great distance, They won't be part of it, But we want everybody here,  
[ 27 : 59 ] And all in our city, Who will listen, We want them to seek, And to savor, His great salvation now, While it can be found, While it's offered to us, Today, And every day, Until Jesus Christ returns, And that's why we'll gladly, Wear out our shoes, And our feet, To keep telling the good news, Of Jesus Christ, Until then, And we'd love, To keep doing that, With all of you, Amen, Let's pray, Oh, Heavenly Father, We thank you, For the glad, Tidings, Of great joy, That in our Lord Jesus Christ, You have promised, To be for all, The peoples, We thank you, That in, The gospel of our Lord Jesus, You have given us, That news, We pray, We pray, That we would receive it,  
With joy, And go on proclaiming it, With joy, Until the day, That he comes, And we ask it, In Jesus name, Amen, In a moment, We're going to see, A final video, About changed lives, And then sing, Another lovely carol, By Timothy Dillie Smith, About the extraordinary love of God, And all that is ours, Just because he loved us, So much, But first, As promised, The choir going to sing a song, That wonderfully, And exuberantly, Expresses that great, Great joy, Of the Christmas message, Thank you,