

Beautiful Feet, Burning Voices

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 December 2015

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, welcome everybody to our lunchtime service today. It's good to see you. If you're here hoping for Professor Terry McCutcheon, I'm afraid he's ill, so you'll land it with me instead. But we've still got God's Word, so all is not lost. So let's open our Bibles, and we're going to read together in Isaiah chapter 52. You'll find that on page 613.

Page 613 in our Bibles. Verse 613.

For thus says the Lord God, My people went down at first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. Or perhaps better, the Assyrian oppressed them recently. Now, therefore, see what I have 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 am I. How beautiful on 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 : 44] 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. Well, keep your Bibles open and let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this. The words that come from you inscribed by your Holy Spirit. Amen. Spoken so many centuries ago.

And yet, your living word that still speaks to us this day of your glory and your grace. And of your great salvation. So help us, we pray.

[2 : 46] As we turn our eyes and the eyes of our hearts to you. Make us hearers, we pray. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, I don't know about you, but at this time of year, I love listening to Handel's Messiah.

I listened to the whole thing through just the other day. And I shall listen to it many more times before Christmas. And one of my favorite arias from Handel's Messiah is just a repetition of the words of verse 7 here.

Actually, it's, of course, in the old authorized version. And it's the words from here as quoted by Paul in Romans chapter 10. How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.

Now, if you know Handel's Messiah, you'll know that that comes in the second part. And it comes between the choruses that speak of great was the company of the preachers.

And their sound has gone out into all the lands. It's a section about the preaching of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. But when you think about it, it's a bit of an odd thing to be singing about, isn't it?

[4 : 00] Beautiful feet. You don't usually think of feet as being particularly beautiful. I don't think my feet are very beautiful. Certainly when I was a doctor, I examined some pretty ugly feet in my time. So what is Isaiah talking about here with all this business about beautiful feet and beautiful feet on the mountains?

Well, of course, it's poetry, isn't it? It's poetic imagery. And he's not really interested in the feet. He's interested in what the feet are bringing. And, of course, the feet are bringing good news.

They are running to bring the wonderful good news that is so wonderful that it makes everything about the messenger seem beautiful to those who hear the news.

It's a bit like, I suppose, when you're anxiously waiting outside the intensive care unit, or outside the operating theater, and a loved one is being operated on. And the surgeon comes out, pulls their gown off, and they say to you, it's gone really well.

And you want to jump up and hug them, don't you? You just think they're the most beautiful person you've ever seen because you've been so worried and you're waiting for that wonderful news. And that's why this messenger is beautiful.

[5 : 09] Because his message is good news, verse 7. It is gospel. Look at it. It's about peace. It's about happiness. It's about salvation. It's about the reign of the God of Israel.

And that's why the watchmen lift up their voices in verse 8 to sing for joy. Because they see this news at long last coming to them. A watchman, of course, would be on the highest part of the ramparts of the city walls, wouldn't they?

Looking out intently into the distance to see if a messenger is coming and to see what kind of news they might be bringing. Is there going to be hope for our embattled people in this besieged city?

And they see the feet of a messenger they recognize. And they say, it's good news. But what is the good news that Isaiah is speaking about here?

And why is the good news so desperately needed? Well, it's the watchman and his news because he knows something that is so desperately needed for these people.

[6 : 18] These folk are searching for news of peace, for news of happiness, because they're in a terrible mess. They desperately need salvation. And this is a message of salvation.

So we need to look a little bit at these verses to work out what it is they were so desperately needing salvation from. What is this song and this great message all about?

And I want us to see two things that the watchman see and understand and pass on, which is what makes their news so wonderful. First of all, they see the dreadful reality of a society and of a world that has rejected the rule of God, its maker.

That's what they see. So look at verses 3 to 5 that we read there. They know, don't they, that they're a captive people. Now, Isaiah is speaking to a people who have a history of captivity.

They're now captive in Babylon. And, of course, Isaiah first spoke these words long before that captivity actually happened because he was a prophet for seeing the future. But when they were in captivity in Zion and they read the words that had been recorded by Isaiah, well, they were all the more powerful, weren't they?

[7 : 32] Because they had predicted exactly what was going to happen to them. And now they read these words in absolute despair in rock bottom in Babylon. And they see the truth of them.

Now, when people are in the pit of despair, they often look over their whole life, don't they? And they think their whole life has been worthless. They feel utterly worthless.

And that was the situation here for the people of Israel. They see their whole history, their whole story in the light of their present situation and the dire situation that they're in. And their whole history, in fact, suddenly seems to them like one big story of captivity and worthlessness.

So, you see, God says in verse 4 that they were captive, first of all, in Egypt. Well, that was a long, long time ago. And then verse 4, more recently, they'd been oppressed by the Assyrians.

But now, verse 5, they'd been sold away to the Babylonians for nothing into captivity. They were a worthless people, worth nothing. And they were in the dust, verse 2 says, their necks in irons.

[8 : 40] Verse 4 says they were oppressed. Verse 5, look, even their kings, even their rulers are wailing. That is how bad all of this is. The leaders of the nation are on TV, weeping their eyes out at the tragedy.

And no wonder they felt utterly worthless. They feel like nothing. And that sense of worthlessness brings a great, great deal of psychological pain. We know that.

We see it often, don't we, in individual people. Who've been beaten down by a terrible feeling of worthlessness because of one failure after another after another in their lives.

Maybe it's because they've been subject in their life past to a great deal of cruelty, a great deal of neglect. I can think of a girl I knew who had desperate issues of low self-esteem, worthlessness, because all through her childhood her father had mentally abused her, never had a good word to say about her, absolutely beat her down all the time, sometimes even physically.

Well, that will leave scars on your life, won't it? I think of a man that I know who is a wonderful Christian leader now in India. But he grew up utterly despised and rejected.

[9 : 51] He was a Dalit. He was the lowest caste of all. And it nearly drove him to absolute despair. Well, we know that happens. But that can happen, can't it? Also to a whole society, to a whole nation.

Think of some of the countries in the world that we know that have been so deeply ravaged by war, by civil conflict and so on for years and years and years and years. It can be a great sense of despair, corporate despair.

And that's what Israel sensed. That's what they were like. They'd sunk so low. They'd lost all sense of confidence, all sense of worth, all sense of love. And that tends to bring a certain kind of paralysis.

Well, that's not too far removed, is it, from many of the emotions, many of the psychological states that we see among people, even in our own society, even in the city in which we live.

And that's why, you see, it is really important not just to see the situation Israel were in at that particular time in history, but to see the root cause that lay behind all of their problems.

[10 : 59] Because there was a deeper problem that was far more concrete and objective than just a feeling of pain and worthlessness. And the reality was that behind all of this lay the reality of a guilt that they faced because of condemnation by God himself.

It's God's anger against them because of their wrath, because of their sin, because of their ignoring of his ways. That's why they're in the situation that they're in.

Look back at chapter 51, verse 17. You'll see it very plainly. Wake up. Wake yourself. Stand up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath.

And that is the word that God is saying to Israel and indeed to all the peoples of the whole world. Wake up to the reality that all of these psychological problems you face, all the pain that seems so deep-rooted in your person and in your culture and everything around you, has a far deeper root even than you realize.

You have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath. And that's why you're staggering in despair and pain. That's why your society is tottering. That's why your society is adrift.

[12 : 20] It's the rebuke of God. Look at the last line of verse 20. They are full of the wrath of the Lord, the rebuke of your God. Now, of course, that is very unpalatable to the modern ear.

If we say that the problems of our society ultimately are due to the anger and the rebuke of our God, there will be outrage, won't there? If you go out in the street and say that or you go on the TV tomorrow. But don't think that it was ever very palatable.

It wasn't too popular when Isaiah was saying it either. Or Jeremiah. Or any of the prophets. That's why the prophets were constantly persecuted and rejected and even martyred all through the history of God's people.

The Lord Jesus himself was abused and rejected and ultimately crucified. Because Jesus' message was exactly the same, wasn't it, as all of the prophets?

Repent and turn back to God before it's too late because the wrath of God is going to come upon you. Now, no one has ever liked that message.

[13 : 24] But here's the truth, friends. You may not like it, but that is, if I'm going to be honest with you, that is the consistent message of the Bible from beginning to end. That all our human strife, all our angst, all our pain, all our broken relationships, all our sorrows, all of it is a result of God's anger against us because of our rebellion and our sin that we've exhibited against him, against our maker.

Even Israel, even God's chosen people, who above all had no excuse for their sin. But not just Israel.

The whole world is condemned before. And that's what the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 3. And that is the heart of the real cancer in our human society that manifests itself in all these different ways, in our psyches, in our social problems, even in our bodily problems, in our fears.

We live as a society with so much fear, don't we, today? Look at chapter 51, verse 13. We fear all the day.

You're afraid. We fear today, don't we? We fear about the economy. We fear about the Eurozone. We fear about our families. We fear about our jobs.

[14 : 49] We fear about the future. We fear all of these things. And many of these are irrational fears right out of proportion to reality. Why? Well, look there at verse 13.

We fear men because we've forgotten the Lord, our maker. How ironic that people refuse to fear God, the God who made all things and the God who will judge all things, and yet we spend our

whole lives fearing man and the things that man can do.

Man, who is verse 12, is just made like the grass. You're afraid of man who dies, but you're not afraid of God who lives forever. We reject the gracious rule of our loving maker, and we're willing to enslave ourselves to the tyranny of a material world and mortal people.

Isn't that extraordinary? And that's what the watchmen see. They see, indeed, what Christian people who understand the Bible see. They see the dreadful reality of a society and of a world that has rejected the rule of God its maker.

And they see the consequences. Well, we all see that. We all see the consequences, but they see the root cause underlying every problem in this world, underlying every broken ecosystem, underlying every broken economy, every broken society, every broken family.

[16:20] The root problem is the sin of man and the wrath of God against that sin and the judgment of God. Condemnation of sin, which is rebellious and which is inexcusable.

So the watchmen are looking out in the world, and that's what they see, and it's a pretty dark world. And the people are in the dust, feeling like nothing, and they see it, but they know why.

But you see, also, they see something else. And this is what is wonderful. They see the wonderful revelation of a God who will not reject the world that he has made, even though the world rejects him.

They see, verse 7, the beautiful feet that carry that wonderful news. Good news of happiness instead of pain. Good news of salvation and the reign of God instead of damnation and the desertion of God.

Again, just look back at chapter 51 and these verses that tell us about Israel's fears and condemnation and sense of worthlessness.

[17:31] Verse 12 again, you're afraid of man who dies, but I, he says, I'm the God who comforts you. It's a great word in Isaiah, isn't it?

Comfort. That's how the Messiah handles Messiah begins, doesn't it? Comfort. Comfort my people from Isaiah 40. Verse 13, I'm the Lord who established the heavens, who laid the foundations of the earth and I've covered you, verse 16, with the shadow of my hand.

Say to Zion, you are my people. Now that is a word of comfort, isn't it? That's a good news word to end all fear. Look at it, verse 14.

He shall not die and go down to the pit. It's conquering the fear of death. There's an end, if you look at verse 22, to all condemnation, all wrath.

The God who pleads the cause of his people says, Behold, I've taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of my wrath. Shall drink it no more. No condemnation is the word of this good news.

[18:50] And, there's an end to the terrible poverty of spirit, the terrible sense of worthlessness. The beginning of chapter 52, the beautiful garments of a bride, beloved of God, take the place of these garments of slavery.

Be seated on a throne like a wonderful queen. That's the language that's being used here.

Jerusalem shall be raised up from the dust and seated and throned like a royal bride before her king.

And you were nothing, says verse 3. You were sold for nothing. But in fact, to me, God is saying, you are beyond any price. You'll be redeemed not by mere money, but by something far, far more precious.

Something of far greater worth than that. So can you see why these watchmen are singing for joy? Because they see this wonderful good news coming. They see an end to condemnation.

And instead of that, there will be peace with God. They see an end to that paralyzing fear. And instead, there will be liberating salvation from this, their God.

[19:59] They see where there was deep pain and where there was anguish. And now there will be happiness. There will be joy. Everlasting joy. That's what they see coming from the words of the messenger.

Well, how can that be? Well, it's because they see that there has been a wonderful revelation of a God who will not reject the world that he has made.

Verse 8, you see, they sing for joy because eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. they see the Lord who had departed in his anger coming back to live among his people.

Verse 9, to comfort them, to redeem his people. And more than that, verse 10, do you see? To bring his wonderful salvation to the very ends of the earth.

The ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. All the peoples of this sad and divided world. It's obvious, isn't it, just reading those verses alone that Isaiah is speaking about far more here than just the return of captives from Babylon to the physical Jerusalem.

[21 : 11] If you read on in all these chapters of Isaiah after this, you'll find out there's far, far more than that is being envisaged. He's talking, isn't he, at the end of Isaiah about the recreation of the world, the whole cosmos.

He's talking about the birth of a new creation, that when the Lord returns to his people forever, it will be the beginning of the recreation of the whole world.

And that's why verses 11 and 12 there, you see, have talk about departing. All of God's people departing out of this world full of defilement in a great pilgrimage of holiness and light to the place where God himself is forever and ever.

It's a journey and the Lord will go before you and the God of Israel will be your rear guard. Read on in Isaiah later on today when you go home and see what that place is like that he's leading to.

It's the place of everlasting joy. It's the place where joy replaces misery. It's the place where the beautiful headdress of life replaces the ghastly garments of death and the place where death reigned.

[22 : 21] And that's what Isaiah's watchmen see. That message coming to them. a revelation of the wonderful news of the coming kingdom of God, of the returning king, of the Lord himself who comes to make all things new and all things right.

Eye to eye they see the return of the Lord. And so they gladly share these glad tidings with the people of their city.

The people who are walking in deep darkness and they shed that wonderful light and peace and joy and hope. They bring that message from the watchmen into their troubled lives. That's why the watchmen are lifting up their voices and singing for joy.

They've seen the problem but at last they've seen the great answer that all have been waiting for and it's coming in the words of the messenger about the Lord returning to bring all that he's promised.

Well friends we're like the watchmen aren't we as Christian people today? We see what they see.

[23 : 28] In fact we see it much more clearly. We see the return of the Lord to bring peace and salvation and the reign of God on earth. We've seen it begin. That's what the first Christmas was all about wasn't it?

His coming to Bethlehem and Nazareth. And now when John the Baptist announces the coming of the Lord and the beginning of his ministry he quotes these words. doesn't he? All flesh shall see the salvation of our God.

It's come now and that's history for us. We know it's true it's certain. And we read through the Gospels and we see the wonderful comfort and the peace that the presence of the Lord Jesus brought to those who are broken and oppressed to the humble of this world to the grieving of this world to the worthless of this world in their own eyes.

And that's a foretaste isn't it? Of the everlasting joy that will be when he returns forever never to leave us again. We know that. We've seen that. We have the message.

And we've seen it made certain haven't we in the redemption that Jesus accomplished on the cross not with gold and silver but as Peter says with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 40] and we will see it made complete when we see him returning forever. Every eye will see him. And Jesus has told us behold I am coming soon I will return.

And we've seen it and we've heard it and we're like watchmen standing on the ramparts who have seen the messengers coming who have received the message and have this wonderful news of joy to keep to ourselves.

Inside the city below the ramparts where the people can't see the message hasn't been heard has it? There are no glad tidings it's still dark people are still depressed discouraged despairing thinking there's no hope.

What would have happened if the beautiful feet who brought that message had never brought it or the watchmen who had received the message had kept it to themselves and left the city still in darkness?

It'll be in mourning wouldn't they? In darkness and despair not because there is no hope but just because they haven't heard the message that has been sent by God to give the good news but it hasn't been spoken it hasn't been heard.

[26 : 06] That's why Paul the great missionary apostle quotes these verses you know if you'd like to look with me to the New Testament to Romans chapter 10 page 946 that's the challenge that Paul gives to the church in Rome.

Verse 14 But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching and how are they to preach unless they are sent as it is written how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

See what Paul's doing in quoting these words. He's calling everybody in that whole church in Rome in the middle of that great city to be the watchmen who having received the news go and proclaim that gospel to the city.

He says exactly the same thing in the end of the letter to Ephesians doesn't it in the famous passage about the gospel armor. Put on he says shoes for your feet as shoes for your feet the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

What he's saying is gospel hearts make gospel feet and gospel voices. You go the feet bring the good news to the city and you tell watchmen lift up your voices to speak good news of salvation of peace with God to tell of the reign of our God and of his coming.

[27 : 46] How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news who publish the gospel of peace who bring good news of happiness.

The voice of your watchmen they lift up their voice together they sing out for joy. Well let's pray that the Lord will be making all of us people with beautiful feet because wherever they tread they carry that wonderful message of a king who is coming and of these glad tidings to the world.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you that you have opened our eyes to see the truth about this dark world but also to see the wonderful truth of the light of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that we would be those swift to go and tell swift to raise our voices to proclaim the reign of our king and the joy that he brings and so may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.