

Stop The Chaos

Lesson for June 4, 2023

Unit III: The Prophets Proclaim God's Power

Scriptural Background: Isaiah 52:1-12

Printed Text: Isaiah 52:7-12

Key verse: *"How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion 'Your God reigns!'"* (Isaiah 52:7, NIV)

Robert Louis Stevenson tells of a storm that caught a vessel off a rocky coast and threatened to drive it and its passengers to destruction. In the midst of the terror, one daring man, contrary to orders, went to the deck, made a dangerous passage to the pilot house, and saw the steerman, at his post holding the wheel unwaveringly, and inch by inch, turning the ship out, once more, to sea. The pilot saw the watcher and smiled. Then, the daring passenger went below and gave out a note of cheer: "I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled. All is well."

Robert Louis Stevenson

This is God's message to Israel and all of His children in this week's lesson – All is well.

Key Terms

1. **Awake** (verse 1) – Fully conscious, alert, and aware. Zion's awaking to moral vigor and beauty.
2. **Chaos** – A state or condition of great confusion and disorder.
3. **Good tidings** (verse 7) – Good news.
4. **Watchmen** (verse 8) – "Sentinel": the noun is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning to "look out or about, spy, keep watch".

Lesson Background

This section continues the theme of the last chapter, making the link with the repetition of the call "awake" (51:17 and 52:1). Now the LORD calls Zion to awake from her sleep because He will not allow His name to be blasphemed any longer.

In the first six verses God calls His people to exchange their degraded condition for their position of rightful service (52:1,2). The prophet, speaking the Word of the LORD, calls for the people to respond to the call of God. The primary audience was the exiles in Babylon who are called to step out in faith and return to their land and their service. Announcing such a prophecy would have the impact of warning and encouragement on the immediate (eighth century) audience — warning not to get themselves into the predicament of an exile and have to face all of this, and encouragement that if and when they did a remnant would return. In other words, no matter how bad the invasion and exile might be, there was a future for Israel—they should expect to return to the land.

The passage continues by indicating that the LORD will vindicate His name by delivering his people from bondage.

When Israel went into bondage she went because of her own sin, and not because the LORD sold her for a price. Because no price was paid as Israel sold herself for nothing, no price was required to redeem her. Israel was still God's possession. Verse 3 introduces this theme in a monologue of the LORD: Israel was not sold to Babylon for compensation, and so she will be redeemed without money. The nation had gone down into Egypt and had been invaded by Assyria—in both cases they were in similar bondage, but in both cases the LORD had not been through with them.

Verse 6 repeats the main motivation for the reunion of Israel in her land—that they might **know my name**. By His great deliverance of Israel from bondage the LORD would make His people know His name. They will be convinced that Yahweh is the one and only God, and that He indeed does speak. He is not like false gods; He is actively at work to bring about His will. The fulfillment of the covenant promises of the LORD will vindicate His reputation and prove that He is completely trustworthy. All the blaspheming and mocking will be suddenly silenced. (<https://bible.org/seriespage/17-announcement-comfort-redeemed-isaiah-521-6>)

Lesson In Depth

I. Praise (Isaiah 52:7-9)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news: The prophet transports himself to the future in thought and sees the people in Jerusalem (in ruins of course) joyfully welcoming the returning exiles with the exclamation that “God reigns.” The basic theological point of verse 7 is the announcement of the good news of **SALVATION** (i.e., deliverance from bondage in exile). The cause of that salvation is God's power over the nations (“God reigns”); the effect of that deliverance is peace and prosperity (“peace” and “good news”). Those who come to Zion with the good news—the returning exiles—are the welcomed messengers. Their feet are beautiful, meaning their coming is wonderful.

No wonder those who bring **good news** have beautiful feet; they are out partnering with God for the salvation of men. The **feet** speak of activity, motion, and progress, and those who are active and moving in the work of preaching the gospel. The point of the verse is that the people will welcome the approach of the messenger who can declare that God is about to fulfill His promise of redemption. The same point applies to today's preaching of the Gospel that announces there is a day of redemption coming.

Who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” The good news – news of peace, glad tidings, and salvation – can all be summed up in the glorious proclamation, **“Your God reigns!”** Where **God reigns, peace** reigns. Where **God reigns, glad tidings** reign. Where **God reigns, salvation** reigns.

The Apostle Paul quoted this verse in Romans 10:16. Isaiah predicted the future: the time would come when Judean messengers from Babylon would come and announce in Jerusalem (from “upon the mountains”) that God had freed them from captivity through King Cyrus’ decree and their families could return from exile. God would reign over them once again instead of their being enslaved by foreign kings. People would return and they would rejoice. Later, John the Baptist brought good news of the Messiah. At Jesus’ command, the apostles preached about Him from Jerusalem to Samaria and beyond. Good News! King Jesus reigns! Salvation has come through faith in Him. What a marvelous declaration – Our **God reigns**.

Your watchmen shall lift up their voices; with the voice together shall they sing: Verse 8 carries the same theme further with a description of the watchmen calling and singing to one another when they make eye contact to confirm the coming home of the exiles. There is no reason not to take the “watchmen” literally in this passage; there would have always been such watchers, whether to safeguard whatever areas were there, or whether the Levites waiting for the dawn in the eastern skies so that they could begin the early morning sacrifice.

“The watchmen who see this happy return are probably those in Jerusalem who had long awaited the messengers. According to Ezekiel, the prophets were the leading ‘watchmen’ for the nation.” (Wolf)

Burst into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: This is a call to praise the LORD for this great deliverance. Even though Jerusalem remained in ruins after 70 years of exile, with the return of the LORD and His people, restoration of fellowship with God and reconstruction of the temple and the city walls would begin. This which would inspire singing by God’s people. God would comfort those who had remained in the ruined city of Jerusalem and those who returned to Jerusalem with His presence in their midst.

God redeemed Jerusalem when they were not worthy to be forgiven. The best thing to do is to praise Him for the gift He gave them. People are called to praise because the “desolate places” are no longer such—in fact, waste or desolate places are being called to sing. The sacrifice we make to Him now is praise.

II. **Publish** (Isaiah 52:10-12)

The LORD has made bare His holy arm: The thought beginning at Isaiah 51:9 (*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD!*) is completed. The LORD has shown His strength, the strength of **His holy arm**.

“The expression *made bare his holy arm* is a Hebrew expression derived from rolling up long, loose sleeves before starting to work. Then the arm was bared – the symbol of any mighty undertaking or initiative.” (Bultema)

Isaiah rightly ascribed to the LORD the return of God's people to Jerusalem. To "bare the arm" meant to get ready for battle, and Isaiah said all the nations would see God in His holy power bringing justice to all the earth by His almighty power. The Holy Spirit inspired Simeon to refer to this verse when he saw the baby Jesus (Luke 2:30). Filled with the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist foretold the coming of Jesus the Messiah and quoted this verse (Luke 3:6).

This Arm actually symbolizes Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Salvation through Jesus Christ is offered to the whole world. No wonder it is a time for joy and singing.

In the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God: God does not make His saving strength known just for those who are immediately rescued. He also does it as a witness and a testimony to others, so they can **see the salvation of our God.**

Today, Christians declare "the salvation of our God" through faith in Jesus Christ and they do so in almost every nation on earth. However, Christians are persecuted in many places for making this proclamation of good news.

Depart! Depart! Go out from there: Prophetically, this has both a near and a distant application. The prophet commands the Israelites to leave the lands of their exiles to return to Jerusalem (Isaiah 48:20; Jeremiah 50:8; Zechariah 2:6-7; Revelation 18:4). Under Cyrus there was only a limited return (50,000), but the final fulfillment in view here is in the future. It was intended for the Babylonian captives Isaiah has prophesied to; but also, for those gathered to the LORD in the very end times.

Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure: Returning exiles were not to defile themselves by taking property home from their exile (Joshua 6:18; 7:1). Since the LORD is present in the march to the holy land, the people must be pure. They must not be defiled by unclean things. After all, they are to be restored as the kingdom of priests. If they truly believe in the LORD, they will separate from the world and follow the LORD's call to a renewed spiritual service. Thus, it is with every kind of deliverance.

This going out is speaking of Babylon but is also speaking of separating oneself from an evil world. When a person is saved, he must separate himself from the world. God wants His people to be holy, as He is holy. The call to separate from Babylon – both literal and spiritual – is a call to purity, for those **who bear the vessels of the LORD.**

The New Testament gave these prophetic words an application in principle by using them as an exhortation forbidding Christians to involve themselves with spiritual ties to forces of heathendom (2 Corinthians 6:17).

For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the LORD will go before you: The prophet holds out for them the promise of divine protection. Unlike the exodus from Egypt, they will not have to go in haste, or by flight, because the LORD will lead them in the way and be their rearguard as well.

He besets us behind and before, going in front to be our Guide, and in the rear for our protection, gathering up the stragglers, so that there shall not be “any left behind,” and putting a wall of iron between us and the swarms of hovering enemies that hang on our march. Thus, encircled by God, we shall be safe.

Christ fulfils what the prophet pledged God to do; for He goes before us, the Pattern, the Captain of our salvation, the Forerunner. “The Breaker is gone up before them”; and He comes behind us to guard us from evil; for He is “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the Almighty” (Isaiah 58:8; Exodus 14:29).

When the salvation of the LORD comes – both in its near and its ultimate fulfillment – there is a sense of peace in the glorious work of the LORD, not a striving in **haste** or **by flight**.

Lesson Summary

Isaiah 52:7-12 describes how God expects the people of Israel to respond after He sets them free from Babylon. God’s salvation requires a response. The response God expects from the Israelites is no different from the response He expects from us when He saves us from eternal condemnation.

The main idea of the passage is that we are to endeavor to respond to God’s saving work according to His word of truth. The Scripture describes for us the way we are to respond to God’s saving work. In this passage, there are five ways we are expected to respond.

1. **Herald the Good News.** God promises to rescue the Israelites from Babylon. The first expected response is that the Israelites will herald the good news of their salvation. The time of the Israelites fighting is over, and the feet of those announcing peace are lovely. They bring the good news of happiness. No more sorrow or crying. It is the end of gloom, misery, and sadness.

The reason for peace and happiness is that God saves the Israelites from their captors. He redeems them from destruction. God reigns as King of kings and uses His authority on behalf of the Israelites. Their enemies do not prevail. God shows Himself victorious. Israelites are the beneficiary of the Lord’s reign.

Everyone loves to share the good news. God will not have to twist the Israelite’s arms to get them to share the good news. It is impossible to keep good news a secret. They will run from house to house proclaiming the good news. We are free! We are free!

God saves the Israelites from Babylon captivity and God expects they will herald the good news.

God expects us to herald the good news. Jesus ends all war, strife, fighting, and conflict. God saves us from being captives in the domain of darkness.

Jesus gives us peace with God. We are no longer God's enemies, and we need not fear His wrath. We enter into perfect happiness because Jesus reigns and sits on the throne. He is supreme over all as the King of kings and Lord of lords. His Lordship sets us free from sin and death. Jesus removes our sorrow and despair and fills us with joy and hope.

In the same way, God expects the Israelites to spread the good news of salvation, God expects us to proclaim the good news.

2. **Break Forth in Joy.** The second expectation God has for His people is that they will break forth in joy. The watchmen see the Lord is coming. They raise their voices shouting joyfully together. The people hear their joyful shouting and they join in.

Everyone knows what is happening. God is moving into waste places and restoring them, so they will produce abundant crops. The places once devastated by Babylonian armies and the lack of rain become productive fields of harvest. Hunger is met with clusters of grapes and olives for oil. Sheep and cattle graze on the green grass of the luscious fields. Polluted streams and rivers sparkle with clean water.

As the waste places transform, God redeems His people. Imagine being captives in a foreign land. The food, language, customs, and attire are all foreign. They lose their national identity. God comes and rescues them and sends them home. They will sleep in their homeland and not in a strange place. They will no longer have to constantly look over their shoulder as they live under the tyranny of their oppressor. The afflicted find comfort. The oppressed are set free. There are dressing and salve for wounds. Mourning and sadness dissipate. Heartache and sorrow become shouts of joy.

When God releases His people from Babylonian captivity, there is an expectation of joyful celebration.

God releases us from captivity. Our freedom is far greater and more glorious than the release of the Israelites from Babylon.

Our redemption is purchased with the blood of Christ, God's beloved Son. We are no longer slaves to sin and death. We have the promise of living as the children of God. We are free in Christ. We are given the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God where there is no pain, sorrow, tears, or death.

God's expectation for us is that we also great joy. Thankful people are joyful people. The New Testament is filled with descriptions of the joy for the believer who puts their faith in Christ.

3. **Point to Christ.** The reason for heralding the good news and to break forth in joyful shouting is God's intervention on behalf of the Israelites. The third expected response is knowing the source of salvation is the result of God baring His holy arm.

In Isaiah 51:9, the Israelites cry out and pray for the "Arm of the Lord" to be awakened and to put on strength. God's holy arm reaches out from heaven and intervenes on behalf of the Israelites. God bares His holy arm so that all the nations know of God's work to free the Israelites. God uses Cyrus of Persia as an instrument to release the Israelites from Babylon. It is Cyrus who sends out an edict to all the world to speak of the greatness of God.

God expects the world to know that His holy arm brings salvation. The Old Testament teaches that God's holy arm is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The next chapter speaks of the Suffering Servant as the arm of the Lord. God expects Christians to proclaim that His holy arm brings salvation. We are to proclaim that the Lord's salvation is found in Christ alone.

As we herald the good news, we need people to see the holy arm of the Lord. People look everywhere for salvation. People put their faith in their good works to save them. They put their faith in higher education or in filling their bank accounts. People put their faith in their careers or their families.

These things are not bad, but they will not save us from the wrath to come. There is only one thing that saves people from the wrath of God. Our only hope is to put our faith in God's salvation, which is to put our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

Endeavor to respond to God's saving work by putting your faith in the arm of the Lord to save us from our sins.

4. **Purify Yourself.** The Israelites will not stay in Babylon but will depart. When God saves His people from captivity in Babylon, He wants them to leave. The chains are loosened so that they may go freely back to Jerusalem.

As they depart, God wants them to be holy. They carry the vessels of the Lord. The vessels are the instruments used to worship God in the temple. They are the bowls for washing and the lamps for light. Babylon is unclean. They are to leave Babylon because it is a place of false worship and false gods. They are to remain spotless as they depart.

God expects that we also will depart Babylon after we are saved. We are told that we cannot be friends of God and friends of the world. We live *in* the world, but we cannot be *of* the world.

The Apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 52:11 when he writes to the church in Corinth.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

We are not people who carry the vessels of the temple. Paul says we are the temple. Paul quotes Exodus to prove that we are temples of the living God. And, if we are temples, how much more are we to be separate and holy than those who carry vessels of the temple!

God's people in all time are to live lives holy and set apart. We are to imitate our Father in Heaven by seeking righteousness and holiness.

Endeavor to respond to God's saving work by purifying yourself from the world.

5. **Follow in Faith.** God expects His children to follow Him in faith. As they depart Babylon, they are to leave in the open and with boldness. They don't have to leave in stealth-mode, being afraid of their enemies. They are to go with confidence. There is no need to rush. The reason is that God goes before them and behind them. God is the guard. He leads them in the right direction, and He follows behind to make sure every last Israelite makes it safely. There are no stragglers who are lost.

We are to follow Christ in the same way. We are to follow in faith. We are to leave the world behind and follow Him with boldness and courage. He leads us.

Jesus desires we follow Him with complete confidence. He is leading us into His kingdom and He wants us to hear His voice and to follow His ways. The Israelites have the Lord as their rear guard to make sure they make it into the kingdom. We also have a rear guard. God gives us His Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our success in following Christ into the kingdom of God. All who possess the Holy Spirit are guaranteed to receive the kingdom of God. God's Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our kingdom inheritance.

Endeavor to respond to God's saving work by confidently following Jesus in faith.