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*“Joyous Feet”*

ISAIAH 52:1-10

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## At A Glance

Isaiah speaks into Judah’s darkness with a breathtaking promise: God Himself will send a messenger carrying *good news of joy, peace, and salvation*. Joy does not rise from within us—it comes to us from God. Judah’s return from exile under Cyrus was the immediate fulfillment, but the ultimate fulfillment came when Jesus arrived bringing *good news of great joy for all people*. Because of Christ’s redeeming work—purchased not with money, but with His own blood—joy is both certain and accessible to every believer. Our task now is to be the “beautiful feet” who carry this joy to others, just as the shepherds once carried the first announcement of the gospel. Joy has come, joy is coming again, and joy walks into the world on the feet of God’s people.

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## Joy To the World

Joy is a wonderful word—especially at this time of year. Yet joy often feels like the last thing we can muster in a world full of noise, conflict, fear, and disappointment. Seventh-Century-BC-Judah knew that feeling well. For them, joy wasn’t merely scarce—it felt impossible. Their city was destroyed, their temple desecrated, their identity shattered, and their hope thin.

Yet into that darkness, God sent a promise—a promise not of superficial cheer once a year, but of real joy. Not a joy they had to manufacture, but a joy that came to them, carried on the feet of a messenger who cries, “*Your God reigns!*” Isaiah shows us joy that breaks into captivity, stands upon the mountains and proclaims the good news of salvation.

Today we see how the God who restored the joy of Zion is the same God who brings **good news of great joy** to us through Jesus Christ.

## Isaiah 52:6-7

**“Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.”<sup>7</sup> 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.”**

## Awake, Awake O Zion

**Verse 1 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.**

Israel had been sacked long before Judah. The northern kingdom (Israel) was taken captive by Assyria and never returned. Judah was devastated by Assyria, but **Jerusalem was spared from capture** through Hezekiah’s faithful intercession and the LORD’s miraculous deliverance.

But they were taken captive by Babylon a little over a century later. Taken captive meant being invaded. It meant their holy city and their holy temple were desecrated by people who had no right to be there. It was given to them by God Almighty.

He had rules about who could enter the holiest places and temple courts. The **uncircumcised** and **unclean** were not welcome. Yet God allowed them to invade because God's own people were the truly unclean ones. **Why would God execute judgment on His own people? Their hardness of heart.**

They may have been circumcised in the flesh, but their hearts remained uncut. Circumcision was never about cutting the flesh for the sake of cutting the flesh. Circumcision was about identifying with a covenant people; a people belonging to God and He to them.

*“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” Deuteronomy 30:6* This was utterly lost on Judah by the seventh century BC.

Listen to God's warning through Jeremiah. *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.” Jeremiah 9:25–26*

These words of Jeremiah were spoken just a few years, possibly a decade, before God began to execute this judgment on Judah; judgement Isaiah predicted over a century earlier.

Here, though, is a call to **awake, awake!** To rouse themselves from sleep, to be alert, to be ready. To **put on strength, O Zion.** To take off the sackcloth of mourning and put on **beautiful garments.**

### Out of The Dust

Take off the sackcloth and get up out of the dust. **Verses 2-3 Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.** **<sup>3</sup>For thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”**

This is typical posturing and activity of those who mourn. Thus the message is to get off the ground, take off the bonds of captivity, and sit with dignity. Your deliverance is near.

Their deliverance would not be a political peace agreement involving tribute paid to a more powerful nation. They would be **redeemed without money.**

The immediate fulfillment came in 538 BC in the form of a decree from Cyrus, king of Persia, who overthrew the Babylonian empire. As the proverb says, the Lord moves the hearts of kings like rivers in His hands. No money exchanged, just a word from a new king. (cf. Ezra 1:1-4) This pagan king even decreed that the God of Heaven is there. Remarkable!

**Verse 4 For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing.**

This contrast between **Egypt** and **Assyria** is used to emphasize God's power to deliver His people from unjust oppression, which is then followed by a call for them to remember their past redemption and prepare for future deliverance. As God delivered from Egypt, so He can deliver from any oppressor, be it Assyria or, in the case of Judah, Babylon.

**Verse 5 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.**

There's a little ambiguity here. Whether **their rulers** refers to **the oppressors** or Judah's rulers is not clear. That it says **continually all the day my name is despised** may be either Israel's rulers profaning God's name, or the nations despising God's name because His people are enslaved.

Regardless, God's name was being despised all day long because His people were being trampled—and God would act so that, as it says in **verse 6, Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.**"

There's similar logic found in Ezekiel 36. *"And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes."* Ezekiel 36:23

In other words, I'm going to act in such a way as to remove all doubt about who is really sovereign over the nations! God's **name** refers to His character, His essence. He would show His people His strength, His power, & His sovereignty. God is continually demonstrating His goodness and His power and His own people continually doubt both.

Again, the immediate fulfillment of this prophecy finds itself in the decree of Cyrus. He just let these people go of his own accord. Yet, a little over five hundred years later Jesus enters Jerusalem to find nothing had changed.

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"* Matthew 23:37

Thus, an ultimate fulfillment remained necessary.

## Beautiful Feet

**Verse 7 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."**

Before the advent of radio waves, television waves, and the internet, messengers were the couriers of news, both good and bad. Watching from inside the protective walls around the city, people waited anxiously for news from the battlefield. When good news was delivered, how welcome it was for a messenger to bring the message of peace, happiness, and salvation! How beautiful his feet!

How much more so when the messenger of God delivers the good news that **Your God reigns!** You've been rescued by Him! He has been victorious!

**Verse 8 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.**

**Watchmen** were those entrusted with awaiting the messengers with good news. When they see it, it sparks a song of **joy** because they will have **seen eye to eye the return of the Lord to Zion.**

After many decades of captivity in a foreign land, Judah must have felt incredible relief to be delivered. To see the return of the Lord to Zion - He *with* them where they *ought* to be - Jerusalem. That was their hope of deliverance and the joy of their salvation.

We, however, have seen an even greater fulfillment of God's deliverance. A redemption made not with money, but with blood - the blood of His own Son.

For those who truly have seen the Lord's salvation, what else could possibly be our response? How can joy not permeate our affections? We won't always be happy, which is one reason I didn't title this sermon "Happy Feet." Not to mention that title is trademarked!

Sometimes life in the darkness is just heavy and hard. But, in the midst of that darkness, there's light. His name is Jesus and He brings joy to all who receive Him. Seems the only fitting response is to

sing! This is why we always close our time of worship with a song. There is always a light, a joy, a response to the good news of salvation.

## Songs of Joy

**Verses 9-10 Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup>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.**

Here is a call to a future generation stuck in the darkness of captivity to burst out in song! Though everything around them seemed like **waste places**, God had already gone before them and won the victory! His salvation, His redemption was a comfort to His people. What a word of prophecy! And this prophecy was fulfilled, at least in part, 2500 years ago with Cyrus' decree. A people taken captive was set free without money, without conflict, without any effort on their own.

Yet we still await the ultimate fulfillment today. See, even today the unclean and uncircumcised, both in flesh and in heart, come and go freely in Jerusalem. So, the prophecy has yet to be ultimately fulfilled. Nor have the nations, the ends of the earth, seen the salvation of God. In many ways God's name is still continually despised all day.

But one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will declare that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. (cf. Phil 2:10–11) Many will do so begrudgingly before a conquering king. The faithful will do so joyfully before a comforting redeemer. And there will be even greater joy for those who were part of advancing the good news of God's salvation and contributed to others being there with them!

## Joy Comes to Us So We Can Carry It to Others

Isaiah says in verse 7, **How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.** Before joy becomes something we express, it is something we **receive**. Judah did nothing to earn it, buy it, or secure it. Joy just came walking toward them—declaring peace, salvation, and the reign of God.

And now the Lord entrusts that same joyful message to us. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:15 to argue for active participation in spreading the gospel, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” Romans 10:15*

The gospel moves forward on feet—ordinary, imperfect, joyous feet. Just think: the first watchmen of joy in the New Testament were shepherds, outcasts the world overlooked. It was these whom God entrusted with the good news of great joy for all people!

*“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord...the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’” Luke 2:8-11, 15*

So joy is not something you wait to “feel.” It is something you **receive**, and then you multiply it when you **carry** it to others.

## Joy Is Given Freely Because Redemption Is Given Freely

Isaiah promises in verse 3, **You shall be redeemed without money.** Judah's redemption began with Cyrus' decree, a redemption they did not pay for, arrange for, or accomplish. It was free.

But that redemption pointed to something far greater: the redemption purchased “...*not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*” 1 Peter 1:18–19

Joy comes freely because salvation comes freely. Joy isn't a reward for holiness; it's the fruit of the Spirit, a gift of grace. Joy doesn't rest on your performance, your circumstances, or your perfection—it rests on the finished work of Jesus, the Redeemer.

And because salvation is certain, joy is certain. Because Christ has come, joy has come. Let that joy not only fill your mind and control your thoughts, nor only your heart, and your affections, but let it work its way all the way down to your feet and let your joyous feet take you along with the good news of Jesus Christ wherever you go.

## Conclusion

Isaiah 52 shows us the kind of joy that can only come from God—a joy that breaks chains, lifts heads, awakens the weary, and announces salvation. A joy carried on the feet of messengers. A joy sung by watchmen. A joy fulfilled in Christ.

We live between the “already” of Christ's first coming and the “not yet” of His return. But in both seasons—waiting and rejoicing—God has given us a message that can't be silenced: **Your God reigns.**

That is why joy is not a feeling we chase, but a truth we proclaim. It is why joy walks on the feet of ordinary people like us. It is why joy endures even in dark days—because joy has a name, and His name is Jesus.

So awake, awake, church—Lift your eyes, raise your voice, and receive the joy that has come walking toward you.