

How beautiful are the feet!

Isaiah 52:1-12

Isaiah 52:1-12 forms part of a much larger unit which actually starts with Isaiah 51:1 and ends with our text. The theme of *redemption and restoration of God's people* runs strongly throughout these two chapters with Isaiah 52:1-12 forming the climax to this theme. The people that the prophet Isaiah is addressing in these chapters are those Israelites who have been taken into exile in Babylonia. Of course, these people are facing, yet again, turmoil as they have been forcibly removed from their lands; however, in facing such struggles, the Israelites are also facing the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. In facing these many struggles, Isaiah finds comfort in the promise of God to restore and redeem His people and so our focus is on Isaiah 52:1-12.

Isaiah 52:1-12 can be divided into three smaller sections. Verses 1-2 find a parallel in chapter 51:9 in that the people in exile pray to God asking Him to 'wake up'. It is an appeal for God to remember what He had done for His people in the generations past and so God responds to them using the same phrase, "awake, awake." God is preparing His people, he is calling them to wake us from their slumber, and encouraging them to stand up and to stand firm.

Verses 3-6 are the second section of this passage where we find a three-part address. Firstly, we have the reminder from God about what He has done for His people by referring back to Egypt, where God sent Moses to redeem His people, and then He refers to Assyria, the first exilic period in Israel's history. Secondly, God brings them back to their current situation in which He vividly describes how they were taken into captivity (not bought with money as would have been the case in the accepted slave trade of the day) by the Babylonians. And finally, God comforts His people with a future promise of restoration and redemption which alludes to two possible aspects: firstly, that God will react during the current generation, and secondly, that He will react when the promised Messiah comes.

And then, the final section of our passage looks at verse 7-12. In verse 7, we have this reference to a messenger who brings good news and verse 8; we have the reference to the watchman. This is interesting because according to the layout of an ancient city, watchmen would be placed in tall towers around the city walls in order to see people approaching. They would be able to tell what type of news was being brought based on the amount of dust being kicked up by the messenger. We need to realise that the messenger would not be taking a casual stroll to deliver the news but rather, the messenger would be running and so the question we need to ask is: why would the feet of the messenger be beautiful?

The feet are made beautiful not based on physical appearance but rather, they are made beautiful based on the message that they bring. In this final section of our passage, the message being brought is one of "good news". That news is the promise of redemption and restoration for God's people, not only the Israelites, but as is clear from verse 10, for all of God's people.

What we now see in verses 11 and 12 is a move toward a practical application in the lives of God's people. This is the way in which we respond faithfully to God's righteous salvation. We should all depart from the places in our lives that hold us captive, depart from the places in life that make us 'unclean', and trust in the Lord, not in ourselves.