

Your God Reigns

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Dear congregation, you've heard this saying, "No news is good news," and that may be true if you're doing well and riding high in life. No news would mean that there would be no change for the worst in that case and that may be good, but if you're in that place that Israel was in the chapter that we read together, no news would be very bad news. Israel was in captivity in exile as she is being addressed here and no news is no change, no change for the better, but thankfully the prophet Isaiah has not only news, he has not only good news but he has the best kind of news. Good tidings, he says. And he calls them and he calls us to hear those good tidings and what they are from our text which you can find in the passage right in your hearing, Isaiah 52:7,

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

Our theme with the Lord's help this morning is simply those last words of our text, your God reigns. We'll see first of all a mural painted in our text. Secondly, we will hear the message proclaimed by the text. And thirdly, we'll watch the marriage proposed in our text and we'll say more about that in a moment. Your God reigns: the mural, the message, and the marriage.

"How beautiful," that's how the words of our text start and it's poetry. One of the commentators says Isaiah here is not speaking, he's singing, and what he sings here is lost in part, for sure, in the English language. The Hebrew prophets were poets and they used words to paint pictures and this verse is no exception. Imagine with me this mural, this painting, a large one, and in the center of the painting is a valley, a dark alley. And around the valley there are mountains on every side, steep and tall, ragged and imposing mountains. Not the beautiful mountains you see on postcards and calendar pages but rugged, dark, imposing mountains, blocking out the light which would otherwise come into the valley. And as we look on this mural in the valley, we see someone lying in the valley facedown in the dust. It's Zion, a symbol of Jerusalem and of God's people, not just of the Old Testament but really of every age. God's covenant people. There they are in this dark valley and they are lying in the dust in sorrow and sadness. They're captives. Verse 3 of our chapter says that it's her own fault that she is there, "You have sold

yourselves," says the Lord, "for nought," for nothing. You have put yourself in captivity for no good reason and for nothing. You went your own way and because of that you're a captive.

This is a picture in the first instance of Israel in captivity in Babylon. Isaiah sees this 100+ years before. She is a far away prisoner. She can't redeem herself. She is chained and the mountains are there to cage her in and yet this pictures much more than Israel, doesn't it? Perhaps you feel it already in your heart, it pictures really all of us whether we know it or not. Children of Adam, because of our sin in our fallen paradise, we, all of us by nature, we're lying, captives to sin and to Satan in the valley of darkness and sorrow and of shame. We in Adam sold ourselves for what? For nothing. We've sold ourselves to sin and we're reaping the consequences.

Well, this is the valley and these are the mountains but this is not all in the picture. Look with me at those mountains. Lift up your eyes and look all the way to the top of the mountains. What do you see? Maybe it seems far away to you, you can barely make it out, but don't you see something moving? Yes, it's people. They're coming over the mountains. They are messengers. And we live in a world of instant communication today, some of us receive 20 or 30 text messages or emails an hour sometimes, but imagine back then when to get a message, especially from far away, would take usually someone coming, usually even by foot to bring that message, however long it took, and until he came with the news, there was no news. Well, this is what Isaiah is picturing here, messengers, a messenger here in Isaiah 52. And in Romans 10:15, Paul makes it plural, "the feet of them that bring good tidings," focusing on the apostles later on, but here Isaiah pictures it all is one, as a messenger who comes over the mountains.

And the interesting thing here and this is Hebrew poetry, is he focuses not first of all on the mouth of the messenger, that's what we might expect, but he focuses on the feet of the messenger, and obviously feet are critical to a messenger, aren't they? You can't get your message to the right people unless your feet can take you there. Feet are necessary and useful to messengers, but the prophet here doesn't say how useful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, he says how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings. Well, why are the feet of these messengers beautiful? Well, three reasons at least come to mind here. They are beautiful, first of all, because these feet are sent feet. You know, messengers don't come on their own, they come because they are sent. "Whom shall I send," the Lord said, "and who will go for us?" The Lord sends messengers: the prophets, the apostles, pastors and teachers. They come from the throne room of God. Calvin says it this way, "A minister of the Gospel is a man whom God has raised from the dust of the earth, set on his feet, placed him in the throne room of heaven, and he has given him a message to speak to his church and to the nations." "Behold, I will send my messenger," says the Lord, "and he shall prepare the way before me." These feet of God's messenger are beautiful because they are sent feet. They're not beautiful because the people are beautiful. They may be beautiful, they may not be beautiful, but they are beautiful because the one who sent them is beautiful. And the place from which they've come, the throne room of God is a place where the beauty of holiness radiates and shines

and if it's right, it rubs off on the messenger. They carry it with them something of that hopefully.

These feet are beautiful because they are sent feet, secondly, these feet are beautiful because they are swift feet. Sometimes you can tell a person's mood from how they are walking, how fast they are moving. You watch their legs and their feet and you sense whether they're burdened and bowed down under a heavy load or not. God's messengers are called to have swift and light feet like the angels who do the will of God quickly, rapidly, and eagerly obeying whatever the Lord calls them to do. The Lord's messengers cannot delay. How can they delay with tidings like this? One day without these tidings is a day too much. There is an urgency. There is a quickness of step to these messengers. It's the message that they bring makes them swift and eager. It's an urgent message. All need to hear the good tidings of good, the Gospel that God has given them.

Well, these are beautiful feet because they are sent feet and swift feet, but thirdly, they are strong feet. They're coming over the mountains. If you've ever climbed mountains, especially rugged terrain, rocky mountains, your feet have to be prepared for strain, scrapes, weariness. And God's messengers, they train to be able to endure whatever mountains it is the Lord calls them to scale. Messengers of God are mountain climbers. They are mountain men. They know what it is to train, to go over the mountains to those who need to hear the message of the Gospel. In their minds, they picture these sad faces of those forlorn captives in the valley and so whatever strain they feel as they climb the mountains to reach them, it's all worth it to see God work joy and happiness in those who need to hear this message of good.

I don't know what mountains surround you this morning, you do, at least I take it most of you, you do. Perhaps you're here this morning in a gloomy valley. Your mountains of sin can pile up and grow higher and higher and close you in and there is no escape, at least so you feel. Mountains of problems. Life and its troubles. Fears can hem you in in a way that you are captive, a prisoner. Perhaps you're here this morning and you've sold yourself for nothing.

It's a remarkable thing what we read in our text in verse 5. The prophet pictures God coming on the scene. We don't know where he's been up to this point, at least the immediate chapter doesn't say that, it just pictures this mural for us, but all of a sudden we hear this voice and it's the divine voice and this is what he says, "What have I here?" God has looked down on this captive Zion and he asks one question which all the universe needs to hear, "What have I here?" Parents know, this is just a simple example, but there are times when parents walk into a situation where their kids are at one another's throats and there they step into it and often with a loud voice they need to say, "What do we have here? What do I have here?" And that's exactly what the Lord is doing here, of course, on a cosmic level. He comes and there is his Zion captive in the valley and God sees it and God knows it, and he appears on the scene, as it were, and he says, "What do I have here?" You see, that's the turning point and that's what we need and that's what the Lord declares to us here. God sees. God knows. He knows that deep place out of which you can't climb. He knows your fears that you can't escape. He knows those burdens that

you've tried to take up that mountain and cast on the other side of that mountain and you just fall back down into that valley stuck, hopelessly stuck. No wonder our passage starts with the words, "Awake. Awake." Twice. Look up, friend. "I will lift up my eyes to the hills," David says, "from whence my help comes." Are you looking up this morning? Look up. Awake and look, over the mountains is coming a messenger whose feet have been sent, whose message has been given to him from the throne room of heaven.

Well, what is that message? Well, let's see this in our second point. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him," and then we have four words, four concepts: "that bringeth good tidings," that's the first, "that publisheth peace," second word, "that bringeth good tidings of good," third word, "that publisheth salvation." Let's look at those four words first. Notice a number of things about this message which these messengers bring and which the prophet is bringing really here in his verse as well.

First of all, it's good news, don't you see? Good tidings. These messengers aren't coming with bad tidings, worse tidings. It couldn't hardly be any worse for captive Zion, but they're coming with good news, with good tidings. "Good news, I bring to you." But secondly it's more specifically a message of peace, and the word here means that the war is over. As Isaiah says elsewhere, "Your warfare is accomplished. The time of captivity, believe it or not, is over. A new era of peace and quiet, of freedom and liberty, has come." It's good tidings. It's peace. But then Isaiah adds, "they are good tidings of good," and this word good "good" really could be translated "happiness or prosperity, welfare." This is good news of good. The absence of evil and the change for the good. Prosperity and welfare. It's not just the release from prison into some neutral state. No, it's good news of good. That's the third word. The fourth word is, it's salvation, the best word of them all. It's redemption. It's deliverance. It's restoration. It's all that goes into the saving of a captive sinner who has sold him or herself into the slavery of sin. There is salvation.

And when you look back at these four words, do you notice the crescendo, as it were, of these four terms: good tidings, peace, good tidings of good, salvation. These messengers that come over these mountains, it just rolls off their tongue, as it were, and it gets better all the time. It's almost as if they're out of breath. They speak these four words so quickly, so rapidly, but they want you to know, "This is good news, this is unbelievably good news. There is no mistaking about it. Don't be confused. Don't get this wrong. I'll say it four times: good news, peace, good tidings of good, salvation." What a celebratory message of victory has been won and now there's a jubilee. There is the freedom for captives. There is the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

Why? How? How can this be? This is where the fifth and climactic word comes in, the very end of our text passage, the words of our theme: your God reigns. Do you know what? Do you want to know why there are good news and good tidings and peace and salvation? It's because the throne isn't empty. Satan is not on the throne. The kingdoms of this world are not the final empires that rule everything. God is on the throne. He rules and reigns. There is no enemy on it but God himself is on it. It is he who has said, "What do I have here?" He armed himself like a warrior. He manifested his kingship. He rules. He reigns. He has not let it go for a moment.

I don't know how it is that you came into church this morning, I don't know how it is that you plunked yourself down on these pews this morning, I know there are times when the trouble of life is such that you can wonder, "Where is God?" That's how Asaph came into the temple one day, "Where is God's power? Where is the evidence of his reign? He seems to have forsaken me. Given me over to my enemies. And yes, I deserved it, but here I am, no way out. Why am I even here in this place? There is no hope. There is nothing that can make a difference anymore." Perhaps you've even cried to God in your trouble and he didn't seem to hear. The mountains became higher and the valley has become darker. The chains have grown stronger and you wonder whether this valley will turn into a valley of dry bones and be your death.

Is there anyone here this morning that came with that on your mind? That in your heart? Where is God? Friends, I have a message for you this morning. This message was first sounded long ago when Adam and Eve were lying in a valley of their sin in paradise when the Lord himself came. They heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden and the Lord ultimately proclaimed his reign over the serpent. Satan would not triumph but the seed of the woman would come one day and he would rule and he would reign and have dominion. And that message has sounded down the centuries. It has gotten louder and louder. The prophets have announced it. There has been this crescendo in a certain sense that you can say has issued throughout the prophetic mouth as we have it in the record of the Scriptures, and it gets louder and louder. What is initially hinted at is proclaimed and published until finally and, again, this is announced in the Old Testament, but there in the New Testament in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's angels who fill the landscape there around Bethlehem, that birthplace of the King, and they said, "We have good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." Their feet were beautiful and they were swift. They were splendid. They were strong and they announced that Christ had been born. The kingdom of God had come in the person of Jesus Christ. He was ruling and reigning. Despite what you see in the manger with physical eyes, there rules a King, the government shall be upon his shoulders. And he lives out his days and he climbs the mountain and he gives the edict of the kingdom, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for of such is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is among you. The kingdom of God is among you." And in his miracles he manifested what that kingdoms looked like as he healed people and drove back diseases and cast out devils and he brought forth his new creative power to bear on a lost humanity. Your God reigns.

And if that were all that I could say this morning, then indeed that would just be a shot in the arm for this captive because this really doesn't redeem him or her, does it? But there is a reason why Isaiah 52 precedes Isaiah 53 and I trust you all or most of you know what Isaiah 53 is all about, it's of one who came and he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. We have gone into the valley. We have made the mountains, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all, says the prophet. There he was on the cross, crucified in weakness and yet, congregation, there was no moment in which he reigned more than when above his head it said, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." When the crown of thorns was the symbol of humiliation and at the same time that

symbol of coronation. Here was one who would die for captives. He would take their captivity. He would go into the prison. He would go into the valley. He would go there where you and I need to go for evermore and he would go in order to break the bands and loose the chains and open the fetters, throw open the prison door, and in that moment of God forsaking us, when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, when it pleased the Lord to put him to grief, when he took that place of Zion in that horrible valley sinking, going lower and lower down into the bottomless pit, it was in that moment that he took death and him that had the power over death, even the devil, and he destroyed him. In his what seemed to be the weakest moment, he defeated our greatest foe. And because of that, dear friends, from the cross he could say to Zion, "It is finished." And because of that on the cross, he can reign and rule in the darkest recesses of our world. Because of what he did on the cross, he can conquer the darkest heart, the most captive soul. He did it on the cross with the malefactor next to him, just as a display of what the power of his cross can do, "Today you with me in paradise. The mountains will melt at my presence and into the city of God we will go." Friends, is your heart a dark place? It's not too dark for this conquering Savior. At the cross, the messengers, at that holy place there in the beauty of holiness at the foot of the cross, the messengers get their message, he reigns. Your God reigns.

As we then move from the cross to the empty tomb, we realize that death could not hold him and that he is out of the bands of death and out of the domain of death and there are his grave clothes as a symbol of the fact that he is risen with a power of an endless life which in the Gospel he hands out and displays and manifests and brings to bear on captive souls still today. Oh friends, isn't this good news? Isn't this the best news ever? "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country," Proverbs 25:25. This is from a far country but it's reaching you and me today. Matthew Henry says when bad news is abroad, this is good news, and when good news is abroad, this is the best news for Zion's King reigns. And, congregation, the message hasn't changed from that Easter morning. It hasn't changed one bit. In fact, Christ ascended into heaven and he said, "All power, all power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples. Go over the mountains, those of you who know your God is reigning, go." The urgency is all the greater. "Go quickly and tell the world the Lord is King."

Dear friends, this is the message and what a glorious message, the Lord reigns. But there's one more thing that we have to see before we close and if you think it couldn't get any better, it actually does as we see in our third point: the marriage. And perhaps you've been wondering what in our text has to do with marriage, it's this, congregation: that this reigning King doesn't just free from captivity; he doesn't just break these bands and say, "There you go. Just live your life as you've wanted to live it." No, he redeems from destruction but he crowns with tender mercy. He purchases a bride to himself and he makes her a queen in this world already, and she will reign with him at his side forever and forever because our text doesn't say God reigns, it says your God reigns. Your God. A God who gives himself away. Who is not ashamed to make himself the God of captives and to make them his. He owns them and they, reverently speaking, they possess him. Your God reigns.

Oh dear friends, the way he works is by his Holy Spirit is astounding. He makes you to need this God. There he is, there you are in this valley and you realize what has happened to you, what you have done to yourself, how you have followed your own instincts, your own mind, and you sold yourself for nought. There you lie and he makes you to need him. Every time you see those mountains going higher and higher, you realize you can't redeem yourself. He makes you by his Spirit to need him. He makes room in your heart for him. He makes you to long for and to need his reign of grace. You know, by nature when we hear these words "your God reigns," well, it's either just kind of an abstract truth. It may be nice when we kind of feel like life's out of control but there is not this, "My life depends on this." Your God reigns.

God makes us to need that by his Spirit and in our hearts. He makes room for himself and then he brings this truth to bear through the message of the Gospel. There you are in places like this or at home or wherever it is, sunken down, sorrowful and forlorn and somehow over the mountains there comes this messenger, whatever it is, and he publishes good news and something within you looks up, something within you opens up. Maybe at first it's too good to be true and you put your head back down in the dust and, "This is for others, it can't be for me." Friends, it's for captives. Are you a captive? Can you save yourself? Have you learned that you can't? Well, here's a God who sends messengers and they publish good news and they publish peace and good tidings of good; they publish salvation widely, openly, no restrictions there. They publish it. They cry it out. They don't make sure that all kinds of conditions and things are met. No, they publish it. They announce it like heralds would to a whole city. There is peace. There is triumph. There is wholeness once again. Thy God reigns.

So the Lord not only loosens our chains, but he takes this forlorn Zion and makes her his own, to fellowship with him. Your God reigns. How does he do this? Well, he does this as we read in Isaiah 54, just two chapters later. He says, "You will remember the reproach of your widowhood no more for your Maker is your husband. The Lord of the whole earth shall he be called. I will marry such a bride," he says. And, dear friends, that is what he is seeking for this morning. Your God reigns.

Let that first word "your" burn into your souls. Is he yours? Do you have a saving interest in this God through Jesus Christ and through his finished work and his Spirit? Is he yours? If he's not, my friends, you're there in the valley, you're a captive, and the urgency is so great because why will ye die with a cross and with an empty tomb? Why would you go into outer darkness? Into an everlasting captivity when there is a message like this? What do you have against Christ?

Friends, if he's on the throne, if he reigns, shouldn't we rest? I mean, if he reigns, shouldn't we rest? You and I love to rule way too much. He reigns, we should rest in his might and in his grace and in his will for us. He holds the reins of the universe. He holds the reins of your life, the big things, the small things. Your God reigns. Rest in him and his finished work, in his promises, in the peace that he proclaims.

If he reigns, shouldn't we bend the knee? He's on the throne. It's a glorious throne. It's an eternal throne. It's a throne that will never disappear. The day is coming when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. Shouldn't we do so now worshiping and adoring him now?

If he reigns, we should rest, we should bend the knee but, thirdly, if he reigns, if he's on the throne, that's a calling to put on your beautiful garments as the Lord says in Isaiah 52:1-2. Put on your beautiful garments. Cast off your sackcloth. Doesn't the Lord say that he will give beauty for ashes? Put on your beautiful garments, church of God. Dress yourself in that white robe of righteousness which he himself holds out in the Gospel. And he says though your sins be as scarlet, he will make them white as snow. Live life devoted to this God. He reigns. He's on the throne. Royal bride, give heed unto his words, forsake your former life and put on your beautiful garments and race towards this God who reigns forever and forever and give yourself unto him. He will give beauty, he says himself, for ashes.

If he reigns, we should rest. We should bend the knee. We should put on these beautiful garments but if he reigns we should also depart. Depart. We read in verse 11, "Get out, get out." What does this mean? This is a call to get out of Babylon. The church in our day is in Babylon and for the most part it's content to be so. It's stuck in the valley and doesn't even know it. It's content. Fine. Depart, depart. Cast off worldly mindedness. Cast off worldly living. Devote yourself wholly unto God. Get out of Babylon and be consecrated to this God who reigns on the throne of the universe.

And fifthly and lastly, if God reigns, shouldn't we sing? Shouldn't we do what verse 8 says, break forth into joy? Who knows how many captives around you, your families and neighborhoods and all around us, there they are, their face is in the dust, shouldn't they hear this? "Tell the nations," the Psalm says, "that Jehovah reigns." He sits enthroned above the flood. There is a God in heaven who is supreme over all. His excellency is great. Tell the world, Jehovah reigns. Tell it on the mountains. There is a King in Zion. There is a King of captives. He will take captives no matter how captive they've made themselves. He'll glorify himself in his great kingdom in your heart and in your life.

Well, friends, I don't know the mountains that surround you but I know the God who can blast through every mountain and to him I proclaim to you this morning. I bend to the cross. I've been to the empty tomb and there is a God who reigns, and I proclaim him to you. Your God reigns. Don't you hear the message this morning? Don't you see how in this message, in these four words, and especially that fifth word, your God reigns, it's as if the Lord is reaching out his gracious arms and embracing a captive people and he's saying, "I'll not only redeem your life from destruction, but I'll put a crown on your head. You'll be mine. You'll be at my side now and forever."

I wonder if one of the reasons that Isaiah focused on the feet of these messengers was that, has this ever happened to you, as you came to church and whoever it was that was proclaiming the message, your eyes went higher and higher and you realized that behind this messenger there was the King himself. Behold, your King. He rides enthroned in the

message of the Gospel. He himself comes. Is there anyone here whose heart has been stolen by this King? Captive though you may be, he takes the worst and he says, "Your God reigns." Amen.