

ISAIAH 52

BEAUTIFUL FEET UPON THE MOUNTAINS!

There are few portions of Isaiah which combine both a historical reference and an evangelical theme as gloriously as this chapter does, and each of these is beautiful and significant. Let us begin with the former. Jerusalem is represented as a dejected and mourning widow; or as a powerless prisoner with chains around her neck (a symbol of degradation and captivity), and sprinkling her head with the dust in which she sits. But now the Lord directed her to lay aside her somber robes of grief, and to put on festive attire of gladness and joy. She is further summoned to not only arise from this dust of humiliating servitude, and to change her mourning garments, and to undo her shameful fetters; but also to sit down upon a royal throne as an honored queen!

In strong poetic language, Jehovah is represented as if He felt Jerusalem's degradation to be a reflection upon His own greatness and power. His glory was at stake if His people's oppression continued. The capricious tyrants who enslaved her caused her "to howl," and His name was blasphemed "continually every day" (verse 5); and at the same time, the unworthy taunt was uttered that her God was powerless to effect her freedom from captivity. And so the Lord beautifully identified Himself with His exiled people, and united Himself with them in their captivity. "My people shall know my name," He declares in verse 6. "My challenged honor shall be vindicated," says He. "My arm shall be made bare, and the cities of Judah shall again behold their God!"

By a beautiful and abrupt transition, a new and brilliant picture rises before the prophet's eye (verse 7). On the heights of ruined Zion, amidst the crumbling remains of her old Temple, watchmen are represented as pacing up and down – now and then casting a longing and wistful eye in the direction of the great northern highway, which had been trodden decades earlier by the band of weeping captives as they had departed on their way to Babylon. But now the vision which had been the subject of many a dream and many a prayer is being realized! There on the distant green slopes of Mount Olivet, and among its deserted olive-gardens, a trumpet of jubilee is heard awaking the echoes of the silent hills around Jerusalem. Messengers are seen approaching the city, and it must be joyful tidings that they bear; for although they are weary and dust-covered from their long journey, they are described as bounding with buoyant steps over the mountains. And in that clear, still air, they can proclaim the object of their mission. The sentinels of Zion – who had probably been gazing from their watchtowers, with wakeful vigilance, for months or even years – now burst out

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Isaiah speaks of the deliverance and restoration of God's people – verses 1-6
- ❖ The great joy of this deliverance, for both His people and ministers – verses 7-12
- ❖ The opening of a discourse concerning the Messiah, which is carried on in the next chapter – verses 13-15



into this exclamation: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!" Then, in verse 8, the prophet is represented as calling attention to the watchmen lifting up their voices and singing; for now they were seeing, with their own eyes, how Jehovah was bringing Zion home! They had surely had many surmises and discussions with one another concerning the time and method of the captive Jews' return. But now, to that faithful remnant of patriot Jews, all is made plain regarding the manner of the long-predicted, long-looked-for restoration. They clearly see how Jehovah's sure Word of promise was

verified. And now, in verse 9, the appeal is made to the voiceless stones and ruins of Jerusalem to keep silence no longer! In a bold figure, they are summoned to join in the jubilant anthem. The grand procession of returning exiles is seen leaving the gates of Babylon – not like the sudden flight from Egypt, in bygone days; but slowly and deliberately bearing the holy vessels which had been sacrilegiously taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple. And Jehovah Himself – the God of the ancient pillar-cloud – is still the Guardian of their march. He makes His holy arm bare for their defense and safety (verses 10-12).

Thus we have seen the literal picture; let us now turn to the spiritual one. We know that the literal fulfillment of these words is truly subordinate to the spiritual meaning; for we have the express testimony of the Apostle Paul (Rom. 10:15), where he gives the words an entirely evangelical meaning – referring them to the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles and other ambassadors for Christ. The truest interpretation of these verses, therefore, points to that mighty deliverance given to the world from the bondage of sin. The return from Babylon was merely the pledge and foretaste of the glad tidings of great joy for all those whom Christ has redeemed. The eye of the Prophet beheld, in a significant symbol, the human race in a state of degradation and ruin. Humanity – like a dethroned monarch and a captive queen – sat powerless in the dust, and all the wisdom that human reason and philosophy could devise had utterly failed to solve the problem of her self-restoration. However, there were some watchful sentinels amidst her ruins; and from the watchtowers of faith and hope, they gazed ardently for Divine help. They longed for the true Sun of Righteousness to rise upon the benighted world, and they did not wait in vain! John the Baptist was first hailed as a herald of glad tidings upon the mountains, and then the Great Redeemer Himself appeared! He came publishing peace and the good tidings of salvation. And now the swift-footed messengers of the Gospel carry the tidings of salvation around the globe, continually bringing more and more lost souls under the beneficent reign of the Prince of Peace!

Lord, we give thanks to You for the faithful messengers of the Gospel, whom You send into our midst to proclaim the good news of salvation to ruined sinners! Amen.