

**CHRISTMAS TEXT: Isaiah 52: 7-10**

- 7 How beautiful on the mountains 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!"**
- 8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.**
- 9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.**
- 10 The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.**

Dear fellow redeemed:

Many of you may recall seeing the famous photo taken on V-E Day at the end of World War II. In this photo, a sailor is kissing a woman in Times Square. When the announcement came that Germany had surrendered, Americans celebrated. It was a comfort to know that peace had arrived and loved ones would soon be home.

Christmas usually finds us in much the same joy. Everything seems peaceful. We again get together with our families and loved ones. In our text today, Isaiah prophesies that **God Has Comforted His People. *He Comforts Through His Word, He Comforts Through His Messengers, and His Comfort is for All People.***

**God comforts His people through His Word.** What did Isaiah mean when he wrote this? Let's study three things from verse 7:

1. The Good News,
2. How the Good News is proclaimed, and
3. How beautiful are the feet of those who share this Good News.

When we hear "good news," we automatically know there's an opposite "bad news." You've probably heard "good news, bad news" jokes, where someone says, "I have some good news and some bad news." A good joke of this type only relates one message, with the other message implied.

When Isaiah talks of "good news," we need to know what the "bad news" is. In the first part of Chapter 52, the "bad news" for Zion was the impending captivity in Babylon. But Isaiah didn't stop there. In verse 4, Isaiah reports what the Sovereign LORD says: "*At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them.*" So the bad news is the captivity in sin we all find ourselves in, oppression from guilt and Satan. From this state there is no escape. Try as we might, we can never escape this captivity. We can never begin to pay off our debt of sin.

But the Good News is the proclamation of peace and salvation! On that night outside Bethlehem, angels proclaimed to shepherds: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests*" (Luke 2:14). This isn't nebulous, earthly peace. In fact, Jesus himself said, "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household'*" (Matthew 10:34-35). Jesus was quoting a prophecy of Micah with these words (Micah 7:6). The peace which the angels proclaimed is peace between God and people—a peace effected by the holy life and innocent death of the baby found in Bethlehem, Jesus the Christ. The good news is that

Jesus' blood has paid for all sins. The good news is that God's anger for our sin was taken by His only Son for us. The good news is we are saved from sin, death, and Satan!

Thus, those who "proclaim peace" and "proclaim salvation" are noted. The Hebrew verb here for "proclaim" is actually a form of the verb that means "to hear." This form of the verb literally means "to make to hear." This isn't just making a speech and whatever happens, happens. Rather, there is a dynamic at work. As the good news is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit "makes us to hear." He opens our hearts to receive, our ears to hear, and our eyes to see. Sometimes, I deliver a sermon that I feel isn't my best effort, or I've struggled with the text and I don't feel comfortable with what I produce. Usually, the Holy Spirit is "making me to hear" what he wants me to hear. And, usually someone says afterwards, "How did you know that's what I needed to hear?" It is the Holy Spirit who "makes us to hear" peace and salvation.

Thus, as Isaiah does, we declare "*how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.*" In Isaiah's day, one often fell at the feet of a messenger who brought good news. But there's another meaning here as well. "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.*" No one will come to hear good news, especially if they are unaware of the bad news. Those of us who have this good news are to carry this good news to others! Inherent in this message is "going out," just as Jesus instructed his disciples as he ascended into heaven (Matthew 28:19-20).

**Yes, God comforts His People Through His Messengers.** "*Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.*" Why do you suppose God uses sinful humans to proclaim His good news of salvation? Wouldn't angels who are perfect be far more effective?

By using sinful humans, God sends messengers who themselves experience the good news of salvation. God's messengers can empathize and relate with God's people because these messengers themselves experience the same struggles. The writer to the Hebrews says this even about Jesus, the ultimate messenger of God: "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*" You can be sure that when your pastor forgives you your sins, this proclamation comes from God himself. That forgiveness is also experienced by the messenger and that forgiveness is for all people.

Yes, Isaiah prophesies that **This Comfort is For All People**. First, the message is for God's own people, beaten and battered by sin and the world. Isaiah says: "*Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.*" The ruins of Jerusalem are now redeemed! We are made whole! We, too, now are made to hear, to experience, the good news of peace and salvation!

But the good news doesn't end with God's people. In verse 10 Isaiah goes on to say: "*The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.*"

The phrase in this verse *“the LORD will lay bare his holy arm”* bears further study. The word for “arm” here in the Hebrew can also mean “shoulder” or “strength.” And, the root word comes from the same root word as a verb that means “to sow [seed].” Usually, when we think of a mighty arm or strength, we think of military might. But the implication here is strength to sow seed. In Isaiah’s day, farmers didn’t have seed drills or corn planters. Farmers scattered, or “broadcast,” the seed by hand. This picture is used by Jesus in his Parable of the Sower (*Matthew 13*). Obviously, the stronger the farmer’s shoulder, the farther he can “broadcast” the seed! And how far will God broadcast the seed of good news? *“For the sight of all nations...all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of God.”*

Immediately following this portion of Isaiah studied this morning is Isaiah’s picture of the suffering servant. The death and resurrection of Jesus, spoken of by Isaiah in the balance of chapter 52 and all of chapter 53, is the means through which Jesus effected this comfort of peace and salvation for all people.

Here at Salem we see many people burdened by sin and guilt. We see many people in sin’s bondage, captive to Satan’s deceptions. Here at Salem we, too, struggle with the forces of Satan and the world. But, here at Salem, God has comforted His people. He continually comforts all through the faithful preaching and teaching of His Word. He continually comforts us through the messengers He sends to us, who themselves struggle just as we struggle. And He comforts us to send us out with that comfort to a world that does not yet know the good news of peace and salvation. Take comfort, this Christmas and every day in the coming New Year, in the Good News of peace and salvation which God has purchased and freely gives to each one of us. Amen.