

Beautiful Feet

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[0:00] How beautiful are your feet? I mean, have you looked recently at your feet?! Do you like how your feet look?

How beautiful are your feet? In 1916, the world's first foot beauty contest was held in the United States. And they had to define the criteria for what makes a foot beautiful, what makes feet beautiful.

And this is what they said. The most beautiful feet, they decided, are those that have favorable width in proportion to the thickness of the ankles. They have unblemished toenails, straight and symmetrical toes, high arches, and a complete absence of hair, calluses, corn, and fungus.

Well, I wonder how your feet match up to that criteria. How beautiful are your feet? Well, the feet of the messenger in Isaiah would probably not have met these requirements.

In the Middle East, especially in the ancient world, the feet were the least beautiful part of the body. In a world where everyone walked everywhere with open shoes because it was hot and it got sweaty and it was dusty and it was thorny and they would stub their toes all the time and they had very little foot hygiene.

[1:27] You can be assured there were no foot beauty contests in ancient Israel. And yet, the messenger in Isaiah is described as having beautiful feet.

What made his feet beautiful if it wasn't that he had unblemished toenails and symmetrical toes?

What was it that actually made his feet beautiful? Well, we read and we realize his feet are described as beautiful because of the message they carried over the mountains to a people who were longing to hear it.

It was a delightful message that the feet of this messenger carried. So delightful and so exciting for the people to hear that they even celebrated the smelly, sweaty feet that carried it.

Later in the Bible, in the passage that Alan read for us, Paul, the Apostle Paul, uses this very verse from Isaiah about beautiful feet to describe those who carry the news of Jesus in this world.

[2:42] The good news that Christians carry in this world, which we call the gospel, is actually a delightful message that this world is longing to hear, hungering and thirsting to hear.

But to see why that is, to see what makes this message so delightful, we need to go back and spend some time in Isaiah, which we're going to be doing over the next few months.

Because it's there in the book of Isaiah that we first hear about this good news. It's not just the gospel and the good news is not just a New Testament thing.

In Isaiah, hundreds of years before Jesus even arrives on the scene, we first hear about this good news. The word gospel appears. In fact, when the writers of the New Testament use the word gospel, they get it from Isaiah.

And so, if we're going to fully understand the gospel of the New Testament, we need to first understand the gospel of Isaiah. And that's what we're going to be looking at this morning.

[3:56] Now, if ever the Israelites needed good news, it was here in Isaiah that was written to the Israelites who were in exile in Babylon.

And they were there because of their sin. They were there because they had broken covenant with God. They had chased after idols. They had broken His laws. And so, they had been invaded.

God allowed the Babylonians to come and wipe out their country to defeat them and to destroy their temple. But even worse than this, the consequence of their sin and rebellion is that God had departed.

God had left them. And this is the bad news that we see in a lot of the prophets in the Old Testament. And it's the bad news that fills the first part of Isaiah, the book of Isaiah, that goes into and describes just the terrible consequences of what happens when you sin, when you break relationship with your Creator.

And what happened to Israel because of their sin, because of breaking covenant with God. And so, that covers kind of the first half of Isaiah.

[5:10] And when we get to chapter 39, by that time, Israel are now in foreign captivity. And they've lost their connection with God.

They've lost their hope. They've got no prospects. All is bleak and all is dark. But Isaiah doesn't end there. Because then, in chapter 40, from Isaiah 40, something changes.

And it's from Isaiah 40 that we find the first mention of this word, good news or gospel. And from Isaiah 40 on it, it starts to appear over and over again, this good news.

And the good news that we start reading from Isaiah chapter 40 is that God had not forgotten His people. And He is planning to come back into their situation, into their world, and rescue them from the enemy that's oppressing them.

And so, they need to now live, even though they're in captivity, they need to live in hope. And they need to trust. And they need to wait for God to do what He says He's going to do.

[6:20] And so, we come to Isaiah 52, verse 7. This is the verse I want us to concentrate on this morning. Isaiah 52, verse 7. It says this, So here in this verse, Israel's situation is described like people looking towards the distant mountains, waiting for a messenger to come over from the battlefield and tell them the outcome of the battle.

Now, this image is a common image that people would have been very familiar with in the ancient world. Unfortunately, many wars were fought. They didn't have the kind of relative secure peace that we have.

There was constantly raids, and there were constantly enemies over the horizon who were going to come, and the constant threat. And when your army went out to face them in battle on the battlefield, what would happen in your city is that you would wait to know the outcome of the battle.

And whatever that news was is going to change your life one way or the other. And so, people would be, and they didn't have any kind of instant communications. They didn't have DMs or WhatsApp or CNN.

They didn't have a reporter in the field reporting back 24-7. They didn't know what was going on out there. They didn't know the outcome of the battle. That was going to change their lives. And so, they would wait. They would wait. And when the battle was finished, the victorious army would send their fastest soldier, who would strip down so that he could run as fast as he could, and he would take the message over the mountains and take it back home.

[8:08] And so, that's the picture we have here, is these people sitting in their city waiting, looking at the mountains, waiting to know the outcome of the battle, waiting for this messenger.

And so, here God's people are waiting. And then they see him. Right there in the distance, just over the mountains, they see this messenger coming. He's running as fast as he can, but he's far, far away.

And they see him approaching. And in the way, it's amazing, in the Hebrew, the way that verse 7 here is written, in its original, is that it's just three words that this messenger originally shouts as he's running towards the city.

And so, he's still far away, probably. And then, he shouts, as he's running, he shouts, Peace! Peace! And then, the guys on the walls are like, what did he say?

What did he say? Did he say pizza? No, no, he said, Peace! Peace! And then, he's running some more, he's running some more, and he says, Good! Good! He said, Good!

[9:12] He said, Good! And then, he comes closer, and he says, Salvation! As he's running towards the city. And then, he arrives in the gates, and he's sweaty, and he's panting, and after catching his breath, he looks up, and he explains what he means.

He says, Your God reigns! Your God reigns! He won! One, this is the messenger's news. This is the message that the people have been waiting for, that changes their lives.

Their God has actually come, like he said he would, to rescue them, and to reign, and to rule as king in their world. Now, this right here, this good news, is the good news, actually, throughout the Bible.

From beginning to end, the good news, the gospel of the Bible, is this, that God has not abandoned sinful humanity, but he has come back to rule the world as king.

He is coming back to rule, to reign. That's what the message in Isaiah was. That's what the good news, God is coming to rule as king, and that is the good news throughout the Bible.

[10:26] God has not abandoned us. He is coming back to rule as king. And that is good news. That is the best news humanity could ever hear. You know why that is good news? Well, the messenger summarized why it is good news as he was running towards the city, shouting those three words.

Because where God reigns, three things happen. First, there is peace. Peace! Where God reigns, there is peace.

The Hebrew for this is the word shalom. And it's a very deep word. It's a very rich word. It doesn't just mean that there's a cessation of hostilities.

The word shalom means that everything in the world is working in proper relation to each other. Where all relationships are working well together.

People's relationships with each other and people's relationships with the world around them and the environment. Everything is working in proper relation. It's kind of like if you have an engine that's really well oiled and all the cogs are working well together and the engine's firing in perfect timing.

[11:41] and it's just humming and there's no sort of rubbing and there's no cranking and there's no sort of grinding and it's just this purring engine that's smoothly running together.

That's really the essence of the word shalom. Where everything is working in proper relation. That's what comes when God reigns. Shalom. Secondly, where God reigns, there is good.

There is good. That word good talks about God's original intent for things. God's original intent for when He created them.

We come across it in Genesis. Right? Chapter 1, when God is creating the world before the fall and constantly in Genesis chapter 1 God sees what He made and He sees that it is good.

Good. Good. That word means that it's working as God intends for it to work. And then where God reigns there is salvation.

[12:44] The third word. Salvation. These are the three words that the messenger would have shouted. Peace. Good. Salvation. Where God reigns there is salvation. What that means is that people are rescued from the power of all that oppresses them and holds them captive.

They are no longer slaves. They are no longer held captive to things and controlled by powers outside of themselves. Now these three words peace good salvation these are the three things that the world is longing for.

Our world and the people in it whether they know it or not are desperately hungry and thirsty for peace and for good and for salvation.

But we don't have that in our world right now. Things are not in proper relationship to each other. That's why we have wars and crime. That's why we have relationship breakdowns.

Because there is not shalom. Things are not good. There is bad in our world. There is lots of bad. There is deep evil in our world. It is not working as God originally intended for it to work.

[14:08] And people are still under captivity. Still ruled by all kinds of things that oppress them. That's why the world is longing for peace and good and salvation.

That's what you and I are longing for in our own lives. Peace. Aren't you longing for peace? Real peace. Shalom.

And we're longing for good. We're longing for salvation. We're longing to be rescued from the things that hold us captive. Well the gospel of Isaiah if you want to know the gospel of Isaiah it's summarized here in Isaiah 52 verse 7.

The gospel of Isaiah is that God is coming to reign to rule as king in this world and he is coming to bring these things to this world that is in such desperate need of them.

Peace and good and salvation. That's the gospel in Isaiah. That's the gospel that the Old Testament builds towards. But now what I want us to do is consider the gospel of the New Testament.

[15:16] because when we start reading the New Testament what you'll first come across is the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Okay.

These are the accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. But something striking appears in the beginning of all four of those gospels.

Now the gospels are often quite different and they cover different things. And there's not a lot of stuff that all four gospels talk about. Only the really really important things are in all four gospels.

The death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus and those kind of things. But then the rest of the details they look at different parts of Jesus' life. But one of the things that appears in all four gospels right at the beginning you know what it is?

All four of them quote from the book of Isaiah. All four of them begin by quoting Isaiah's good news about God coming to reign.

[16:17] You can look it up in your own time. Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1. They all quote the same passages from Isaiah where it starts to talk about the news of God's reign coming to earth.

In other words what the gospel writers are saying Matthew, Mark, Luke and John by starting their gospels that way they're saying hey the gospel we're about to tell you the story of Jesus that you're about to read is the gospel of Isaiah now starting to happen.

In other words the gospel when we talk about the gospel what do we mean? What do the New Testament writers mean? Well they mean that the gospel is not just how to be saved from your sins and go to heaven.

No. The gospel is that's part of it salvation is part of it but actually the gospel is much bigger than that the gospel is the gospel of Isaiah the gospel is the news about God coming to reign as king in this world that is the gospel and more than that this is the mind-blowing part the gospel writers are claiming that with the coming of Jesus Christ to this world that reign has already begun.

That reign the reign of God that Isaiah was looking towards and promising that the people were waiting for has now already begun because Jesus has come. That's what the gospel writers are trying to tell us that's why they talk about the kingdom so much.

[18:00] That's what Jesus meant in Mark 1 verse 15 when he says the time has come the kingdom of God has now come near. It's what Jesus meant in Luke chapter 4.

Let me read to you from Luke 4. This is when Jesus goes into the synagogue on the Sabbath and they're reading and typically different rabbis would come and read different parts of scripture and then we read this in Luke 4.

and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it he found the place Jesus deliberately looked up in Isaiah he found the place where it was written and he said the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. So these are things in Isaiah that Jesus is quoting that Isaiah said would happen when God comes to the earth to reign and then he goes on from verse 20 then he rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

[19:22] today. It's what Jesus meant in Matthew 28 at the end in the Great Commission when he says to his disciples after his death and resurrection just before his ascension he says all authority in heaven and on earth has now been given to me therefore go out and make disciples because now he has authority on earth.

It's what Peter meant in his sermon in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost that great opening evangelistic sermon where thousands of people were saved in the climax of his sermon he says these words therefore let all Israel be assured of this God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Messiah.

Messiah. And it's why later on in Acts 17 when Paul was proclaiming the gospel and people in the city of Thessalonica were opposed to him and they started searching for him reading from Acts 17 but when they did not find him they dragged Jason as he's another Christian and some of the other believers before the city officials shouting these men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here and Jason has welcomed them into his house so why were they so bothered?

Why were they so irritated with these men? Well they say it in the next line they are all defying Caesar's decrees saying that there is another king one called Jesus. You see throughout the New Testament the gospel is God's reign has begun on earth in Jesus.

and this is so important for us to get because we tend to think of God reigning on earth as something coming in the future.

[21 : 16] We look forward even as Christians we look forward to God coming to rule on earth where all these things will be fixed and where there will be a reign of peace and good.

But the New Testament declares no it has already begun. the reign of God on earth has already begun. I was at the waterfront a couple of years back and I was walking past and they had I was outside by the canals where I go paddling and they had a board with a picture of a new building complex that they were planning to build at the waterfront.

and I looked at it and it looked very pretty it looked very swish I'm sure we wouldn't be able to afford it but it was kind of an apartment complex and it looked beautiful and I thought to myself I wonder if they are ever going to get this off the ground I wonder when they are going to start doing this and I carried on walking I turned the corner and I realized they had already started the foundations had already been laid the structure was already up see I thought this was a future thing but they had already begun and it's the same with the kingdom of God we think that God's reign on earth is all about the future but actually there is a very real sense in which God's reign has already begun on earth and we need to realize this if we are going to have the confidence and the passion to follow Jesus as we should in this life and stand for him we have got to realize the king is already ruling here now the kingdom is not in its completion but it's already begun in a very real way we need to understand this if we are

Christians now it's worth saying there are those who make the mistake of assuming that God's reign is already here in its fullness and in its completion and you'll come across Christians like that who are teaching wrongly that we can now overcome everything that burdens us in our lives all sickness all trouble we don't need to have that we can be free of those things here and now full healing full wealth full prosperity or those Christians who say that we can have Christian nations where we can have Christian rules and order and societies can be fixed if we have Christian rulers now of course we want Christians in government but it's a mistake to think that we will fully have God's kingdom here through having enough Christians in government and so there are those who make the mistake of assuming

God's reign is already here in its completion but let me tell you there are also many many Christians who make the opposite mistake and I think that's more frequent in our Christian tradition and the opposite mistake is not to believe that Christ truly reigns in a very real way on earth already and the reason that we tend to think that is because quite honestly it doesn't look like he does right you look around in the world you look at the news it does not look like Jesus is in charge it does not look like he is reigning as king yet and so we put that into the future and we say I can't wait until that happens I can't wait until he reigns as king but we don't believe that he is currently reigning as king because we look around in the world and it doesn't look like that you know if Jesus was reigning if God's reign was here on earth surely it would be better like Isaiah says there would be peace there would be good there would be those good things of God's reign well it's then when we think that it's then that we must remember how

[25 : 23] Jesus told us the kingdom would come in his parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 that we looked at earlier this year I wonder if you remember them and what he was telling us in them the parable of the wheat and the weeds remember that one and what we learned in that is that Jesus was saying the kingdom of God will grow alongside earthly kingdoms for a time and there will be this mix of the wheat and the weeds or the parable of the leaven and the mustard seed parables of the leaven and the parable of the mustard seed which taught us that the kingdom of God won't initially be something we can see physically visibly but eventually it will grow to cover all the earth you see these parables in Matthew 13 tell us how the reign of God will grow in the world but we need to know it is already here the reign of

God has come it has arrived with Jesus Christ that is what the gospel writers are telling us over and over again Jesus is already ruling millions of lives today through his word that is how this king currently rules his subjects through his word and their obedience to it and you know Jesus has already got far more devoted and obedient subjects than any earthly king has ever had Jesus has far more devotion love as king and obedience than you know Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping would love to have from their subjects but they never will like in the parables the kingdom is unseen at the moment but it is still the most powerful kingdom the world has ever known and it is only growing it is here it is real and wherever this kingdom is wherever

Jesus reigns now we do see the fruits growing that Isaiah said would come peace and good and salvation we see wherever Jesus reigns we see peace we see peace growing people ruled by Jesus start to experience a peace Philippians says that surpasses all understanding and as they obey Jesus and they obey what he says and how he rules his people in his word what they do is they bring grace and peace to their relationships where there would only be conflict and where there was only conflict before they bring peace and grace into situations in the world in their offices in their families in their homes wherever it is Christ's people who are obeying his word start to bring peace to the world around them wherever Christ reigns and wherever Christ reigns we see good starting to grow people ruled by

Jesus get to start living good lives they get to start living the type of lives that God originally intended and as they obey Jesus as their king through listening and obeying his word and they go out and they do what he said and they are salt and light in the communities around them and they are helping the poor they are bringing good into the world into situations that there was only ever bad before and we we've seen it in our church we've seen people come out of terrible situations who would have never experienced good unless St.

Mark's were here unless Jesus was reigning here in Plumstead through us who obey his word and wherever Jesus reigns we see salvation we see people ruled by Jesus experiencing real power in their lives to overcome the things that would otherwise oppress us forces of sin and evil if it wasn't for Jesus and his reign here and now and as we obey Jesus and share his good news in the world around us we get to liberate others from those forces as well there is salvation here now there is good there is peace wherever Jesus reigns because this is the news we get to bring to the world it was the same news as Isaiah!

[30:06] messenger running over people that God's reign has begun and because of that there is peace and good and salvation now available in this world it is available to you those things are available to you peace and good and salvation because Christ reigns today those things are available in your life those things that are weighing you down those things that are preventing you from having peace the bad in your life Jesus has come and he's already here to overcome those things to conquer those things to give you real peace to make real good in your life where there is bad and to save you from the things that oppress you and weigh you down and that is why if we look at Isaiah 52 and how it presents this good news in

Isaiah 52 verse 7 and 8 and 9 what's interesting is how that good news is bracketed at the beginning and the end with the call to how now to respond to the good news so Isaiah 52 verse 1 and 11 on either side of the proclamation of this good news we read Isaiah 52 verse 1 awake awake oh Zion as Dylan read for us earlier to make sure that anybody who was sleeping would wake up right but that's the point that's that's what we're to do now that the reign of Christ has come and then at the end it says in verse 11 depart depart so it starts with awake!

awake! and it ends the we are to wake up we are to stop being ruled by our sin and our worries and those things that weigh us down the gates are open to get out of that to depart from that and to find new life because God has come in Christ and he is reigning today have you heard that good news you may have heard the gospel in some form or another but have you heard that gospel have you heard Isaiah's gospel have you heard the biblical gospel and have you responded to it have you come under the reign of Christ in your life if not if you are not one of his subjects whose life is ruled by his word and you maybe just treat his word as suggestions or maybe not read it at all if you are not yet under the reign of Christ well I want to tell you there is nothing better than being under the rule of this king because that is the only way and

I can promise you this being under the rule of this king is the only way you can ever experience the true peace the true good and the salvation that God wants you to have and that you actually deeply long for and if you have come if your life is ruled by him through his word well then I want you to realize as Paul says in Romans you have beautiful feet no matter what they look like maybe your toes are not symmetrical maybe you do have calluses maybe your feet are full of hair but they are beautiful because they get to carry this good news to people who are longing to hear it in this world the good news that in Jesus God has come God has won and God is reigning let's pray Lord we thank you for this good news that you have come and you are reigning like you promised that your reign has begun your kingdom has begun and we get to be part of it and we get to declare that good news to the world around us and we get to be the channels of peace and good and salvation to others

Lord would you help us would you help us to be that Lord cause us to to seek those things that your reign has brought to this world and to help us to to to awake and depart from from being under the oppression of sin and death and Lord help us to live these new lives you call us to and through us Lord would you continue to grow your kingdom would you continue to bring the peace and the good and salvation that you promised in Jesus name Amen you