

Beautiful Feet - Mr Ian Macrae

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, with dependence on God to help us and guide us, I think for a short time this evening on words that we find in Isaiah 52.

Who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns.

Who is doing something.

And he says of this arrival that the feet of the one that brings good news are beautiful on the mountains. He's talking about a preacher. We want to think for a short while about four aspects of this preacher.

To discover something of what Isaiah's message meant to his original hearers and how it still applies to us this evening. And the first of those aspects to look at is the preacher's identity.

[1 : 44] Now, you're probably most familiar with the words of our text in their New Testament context. Paul quotes them, more or less, in Romans 10.

Where he's talking about the need for preachers to proclaim the gospel. And he says, how beautiful are the feet of those that preach the good news. Almost identical, but not quite.

What's the difference? Well, the difference is found in just one word. One small word. Where Isaiah sees him. Paul sees those.

Does it matter? Does it change the meaning of the two verses? Well, it changes the meaning dramatically, friends. Paul's talking about men whom God has called to preach the gospel.

And he's been saying that in order to be saved, you need to have heard the message of the gospel. The message of salvation. And Paul says that the main method of hearing that is through preaching.

[2 : 47] And that those who preach are sent by God. And as a result of the message they proclaim, and the effect that message has on people's lives, Paul says that the feet of those who preach are beautiful.

So we read what Paul says in Romans 10, and we think correctly of ministers and missionaries who are particularly called and sent out by God to preach the gospel.

So, surely if that's Paul's message to the Romans, all he's doing is echoing Isaiah's message to Judah centuries beforehand.

Surely if Paul is talking about preachers, Isaiah's talking about prophets, the preachers of his day. But he's not talking about prophets in general at all.

How do we know that? Well, we know that in the simplest sense because of the language. Isaiah says, Isaiah says, Isaiah's talking about one individual and one individual only.

[3 : 56] So who is that? Well, some believe that this character Isaiah's talking about is a herald, a messenger, who would years later run towards Jerusalem, declaring that the people had been set free from their captivity under the Assyrians or under the Babylonians.

And no doubt this man, when he came, and he did come, historically he came, he would have been greatly welcomed. He would have been a celebrated site in Judah, and his message would have been welcomed by all the people.

So is this what Isaiah's thinking of? Well, I don't think so. Isaiah's name means Jehovah is salvation.

And the word salvation is a very important, a very precious word to Isaiah. He uses it 26 times in his prophecy. The other 15 prophets in the Old Testament use it, a total of seven between them.

And Isaiah's using that word here. It's unlikely that he would have used a word that was so precious, so special, so full of meaning to him, to describe deliverance from literal captivity.

[5 : 17] But more than that, friends, if Isaiah's thinking about this future herald of good news, this man who's going to say that their captivity is over, then his prophecy is temporary.

Because if the good news, if the peace, if the salvation, which were declared, referred to civil peace, and civil salvation, it didn't last long for Judah.

And a temporary peace, and a temporary salvation, are nothing for us to get excited about this evening. So could he be talking about himself then?

Well, without question, he brought good tidings to the people of Judah. And no doubt, some of them, maybe many of them, would have appreciated his message.

They'd have appreciated his work. And as a result of that, they would have valued himself. But do you think that the same man who, in chapter 6, said, I am lost, I am a man of unclean lips, is going to be speaking about himself in this way, in chapter 52?

[6 : 26] Seems very unlikely. Okay, so how about one of the other prophets, or one of the disciples, or maybe one of the apostles? Is he talking about the apostle Paul, with all the letters that he wrote, to the New Testament church?

Well, all of these people, they brought good news to people, in desperate need of it. And doubtless, people loved them for their work. They loved them for their preaching. But the context of this chapter, leads us away from thinking in those terms.

From chapter 49, to chapter 59, Isaiah is more or less exclusively speaking, about one person. He's speaking about the Messiah, Jesus.

And surely he is the prophet, he is the preacher, that Isaiah is talking about here. Did he bring good news? Did he proclaim peace?

Did he publish salvation? Of course he did. Whoever did it, like he did it. The context Isaiah sets for us, leaves us with just this one logical conclusion, that Jesus is the preacher, of whom he is talking.

[7 : 42] And Jesus doesn't merely bring good news from God. He is the good news from God. So that's the preacher's identity.

Secondly, the preacher's journey. How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him, that brings good news. Well, why on the mountains?

And why is Isaiah talking about, the preacher's feet? Well, let's take them in turn. Literally, the land of Israel, is a hilly country.

And the highest hills, are referred to as mountains. Usually, when we hear, or read of mountains, we think of, maybe the Alps, or the Himalayas, or the Andes.

The mountains in Israel, by all accounts, don't reach those sort of heights. But they're still significant. They're tall hills. And those who heard Isaiah, say these words, initially, they have been very familiar, with the idea.

[8 : 47] They have been surrounded, by these mountains, on all sides. And they would also have been, familiar with the idea, of visitors coming to them, and appearing, over the mountains.

Now this would have been true, whether it was a friend, or a foe. An enemy army, marching on Jerusalem, would have been seen, far off, cresting the mountains, and would have filled them, with dread, and horror, and fear.

But their own, returning army, after a conquest, they would also have been seen, cresting the mountains. And they would have been, a cause for rejoicing, and celebration, as they made their way back, to their hometown.

And those who came, with good news, such as, the herald, who would later, proclaim, Judah's freedom, from captivity, they would have had, a wonderful effect too.

So for Isaiah's initial hearers, the reference, to the mountains, would have made, perfect, literal sense. But if Isaiah, is prophesying about Christ, what does the mountain, reference mean, in relation to him?

[10 : 00] Well we can interpret that, in a number of ways, that are relevant, to this verse. Now literal, literal mountains, are often seen, as a barrier, and that's the imagery here.

But what kind of barrier, could they represent? Well there's the barrier, of God becoming man, in the first place. In the sense that, humanly speaking, the idea of a perfect, and sinless God, somehow becoming a real man, in a sinful world, and taking sin to himself, seems impossible.

The gulf, between God, and man, looks insurmountable, but, God found a way. And Christ, has come over, these mountains. And then there's the barrier, of forming a relationship, with God.

How can you, how can I, have a relationship, with the holy God, against whom, we have fatally sinned? Isn't that a huge barrier, to overcome?

And the actual barrier, there friend, for you, and for me individually, is sin. Your sin, mine, not anybody else's. And your sin, is such, that it towers up, it's higher, than any mountain.

[11 : 16] Because it's, come between, you, and the God of heaven. And it stretches, wider than any mountain range. It stretches, to the horizon, and beyond. Because you've sinned, in every single aspect, of your life, over, and over, and over, again.

It is more lethal, than any mountain range. Because, to try to overcome it, to try to conquer your sin, on your own, friend, is guaranteed, to end in total, and utter, disaster, and destruction.

See, it's not you, who climbs over this mountain, from your side. Jesus appears, on the summit, from the other side. And he comes down, to meet you, without you ever, having to take a step, up that slope.

Isn't that incredible? your sin, is a barrier, between you, and God. Insurmountable, for you, but, not for him.

And of course, the problem, isn't just that, we won't, come to God. But that, in our sin, we can't, come to God. Unless, he first comes, to us.

[12 : 29] And then, we can think, of the mountains, as representing, the trials, and challenges, that Jesus faced, whilst he was on earth.

He faced opposition, he faced injustice, his enemies, were the superpowers, of the day. He was forsaken, by God the Father, for a time. He died, and was laid, in a tomb.

These are challenges, that would defeat, any, and every, individual, in the whole, of history, except, for one man. And that one man, is the preacher, Isaiah is talking about.

Because he overcame, the mountain ranges, of impossible odds, and powerful enemies, and even death. So, if that's some, of what the mountains, represent, why, does Isaiah say, that it is the preacher's feet, that are beautiful.

Well, feet in the Bible, are often used, to represent, the whole person, or to symbolize, action. For example, in Joshua 3, it was, when the feet, of the priests, who were carrying the ark, touched the water, in the river Jordan, that the water, separated.

[13 : 50] Because, they had, to do something, they had to act, in faith, before they saw, a result. The feet, there were symbolic, of their faith, being put into action.

And you'll remember too, when the Lord, washed the feet, of the disciples, Peter didn't want him, to wash his feet. But Jesus, told him that, to wash his feet, represented, his whole person, being made clean.

The feet, represent, the whole man, the whole woman. It speaks to us too, of activity, of work, of travel. And, don't Jesus' feet alone, talk to us of so much?

They're the feet, that carried him, many hundreds of miles, around Judea, and the surrounding lands. They're the feet, that were nailed, to the cross, in order to prolong, his sufferings, and delay his death, in the cruel mind, of the Romans.

So, what journey, did this preacher make? Well, of course, Jesus journeyed, all around Judea, and beyond.

[14 : 57] But it's not really, that journey, that concerns us. It's the journey, that took him, from his place, at the right hand, of God in heaven, where he had been, for all eternity, to becoming, a man, in a world of sin, to dying on a cross, to being laid, in a tomb, to rising from the dead, and eventually, to return, to the right hand, of God in heaven.

That's the journey, that especially, interests us. It was a long journey. Now, I don't mean, to say, I don't mean, that it was a long journey, in the sense of distance, but long, in the sense of experience.

And just as, in some of the large cities, of the world, you can pass, from a wealthy area, to an area, that's deprived, that's full of poverty, and squalor, within a few city blocks, or within a few hundred yards.

So this, that huge contrast there, this journey, is more about, the extremes, of his experience, rather than, the physical distance. You need to remember, friends, that this preacher, has always existed. He's always been God. He's always had, unlimited power, and authority. He created the world, and everything in it. He knew every detail, of what was going to happen. He always experienced, the relationship, of perfect, peace, and love, and harmony, with God the Father.

[16:21] And he never, not once, not for one microsecond, had he done, anything worthy, of blame, or criticism, or penalty.

This is the preacher, we're talking about. And this was, the starting point, of his journey. It was also, a long journey, in terms of, what he had to give up.

For 33 years, or so, he gave up, his divine power. Not that he lost it, but, he chose not to use it, in order to accomplish, his mission. And, he lived within, the same parameters, as every other man, woman, and child.

The one, who spoke, the creation, into existence, had to learn, how to talk. The one, who created water, was thirsty.

The one, who knew everything, had to learn. But, not only was it, a long journey, it was a hard, journey.

[17:24] The one, who had never done anything, that could offend, or hurt, or damage a soul, was, as we read, in chapter 53, despised, and rejected, by men. Now, I'm sure, that you feel, a sense of injustice, when someone, has something, against you.

And, that's, even though, there's a chance, that as a sinner, you've maybe, given them a reason, to have something, against you. But, how would it feel, for Jesus, who had done, or said nothing, to give people, a reason to oppose them, to be despised, and rejected?

And, friends, by whom, was he despised, and rejected? He was despised, and rejected, by men. He was despised, and rejected, by the very men, and women, he had created, to whom, he had given life.

He is the only one, who has ever lived, who didn't, deserve to be despised, who didn't, deserve to be rejected, and yet, he is the most despised, and rejected man, in all of history.

Well, friends, you and I, do so much, against him. We break his laws, we take him for granted, we offend him, we let him down, we do all these things, to such an extent, that we deserve, to be rejected, by him.

[18:51] But, how does he treat us? Come to me, all you who labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Oh, we treat him in a way, that he doesn't deserve. He treats us, in a way, that we don't deserve. But, there's no comparison, between the two.

How would it have been, for the sinless God, to come and live, surrounded by sinful, men and women, confronted by sin, everywhere he looked. This is the one, of whom Habakkuk said, you who are of pure eyes, and to see evil, and cannot look at wrong.

Yet, here he is, being forced, to look at, and deal with sin, and wickedness, every moment, of every day, of his life, here on earth. This was completely, alien territory to him, going against his very nature, yet he accepted it, as part of his journey.

And his journey, involved, carrying your sin, all his life, and dying, while suffering, the punishment, for your sin, if you're one of his own. Not for his own sin, because he didn't have any, but for the sins of others, for the sins of those, who despised him, and rejected him.

[20:12] His journey, involved suffering, and the height, of his suffering, surely, was being forsaken, by God the Father. Can you imagine that? Of course we can't. But God the Father, and God the Son, they've existed, in perfect union, and fellowship, from all eternity, having that fellowship, broken, for the three darkest hours, in the world's experience.

for whom, being forsaken, wasn't just being abandoned. For whom, being forsaken, was being judged, in your place, and mine.

Bearing the wrath, that our sin deserved, so that, God would never abandon, those who are his.

Why was Christ, forsaken by the Father? Because he was carrying, your sin, and mine.

which God the Father, couldn't look at. And friend, he suffered, being forsaken by God, so that you will never have to, if you believe in him.

The third aspect we have, is the preacher's message. Now Jesus had the most extreme, of journeys, in his experience, on earth, but he made the journey, because he had a message.

[21:35] And Isaiah summarizes it, for us here, with five short phrases. He brings good news, publishes peace, brings good news, of happiness, publishes salvation, says to Zion, your God reigns.

Now these five phrases, aren't five separate messages, they're five aspects, of the same message. And what is that message? Well, you mentioned earlier, some think it refers, to the end of a future

captivity, but there's more to it.

The commentator, Matthew Poole, put it something like this. Isaiah is referring, referring to something, far greater, than the limited, and temporary return, from Babylon. While that event, began the good news, it's through fulfillment, comes in Christ, through whom alone, real peace, and salvation, are found.

The good news, the peace, and the good news, of happiness, they're all elements, of the ultimate message, salvation. This preacher, has come to preach, the good news, that there is, salvation.

But, the concept, the idea of salvation, is only meaningful, if there's a context, of trouble, or danger.

[22 : 54] If there's something, to be saved from. If a fireman, burst through the doors, just now, came in here, and said to everyone, it's okay, you're safe, it would be, completely meaningless, because, we're not in danger, as far as we know anyway.

But if you were, on the top floor, of a burning building, and a fireman, appeared at the top, of a ladder, at your window, and said, it's okay, you're safe now, it would be, the most welcome, and meaningful message, in the world.

There's a context, to the message. Well the people of Judah, were familiar, with trouble. They knew, what it meant, to live under threat, and captivity.

And Isaiah's message, of a coming salvation, would have been relevant, it would have been welcome, it would have given them, a crumb of comfort, in the face, of yet more trouble. They had a context, in which to place, this message, of salvation.

Judah's captivity, when they were taken captive, was severe. But it was temporary. There was, always hope of release. But your situation, as a sinner, is far more serious.

[24 : 10] Because you, were born, into captivity, to sin. You're unable, to free yourself. And without intervention, that captivity, doesn't even end at death. See, by your sinful nature, and mine, you are a captive, to sin, and to the devil.

And there's no chance, these captors, are going to let someone, go willingly. It's a captivity, that will carry on, beyond death. Because the devil's, captive, remains the devil's captive.

Unless Jesus, rescues you. And that is, this is your predicament, by nature friends, life, and eternity, as a prisoner, of the devil.

Your life, your death, your eternity, are in the balance. That's your context, for this message, of salvation. Well, this is the preacher's, message of hope.

It's a message, of life, and promise. Not just that, salvation is coming, but that salvation, is here. I came, said Jesus, that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

[25 : 13] This is the good news. This is the peace, this is the good news, of happiness, that Isaiah's, promised preacher, declares. And he's declaring it, to you, and to me.

And he finishes, his message, on a triumphant note, saying to Zion, your God reigns. Well, who's the message for? It's a message, for Zion.

It's a message, for the children, of Israel, God's chosen people. But in the Bible, Zion represents, every child of God, throughout, all the ages. And so, it's a message, for every one of us, if we are his.

God reigns. What does that mean, for you? Well, it means that God, conquers his, and your enemies. It means that God, can and will, overturn, and overrule, your misfortunes.

It means that God, will emerge triumphant, when all is said and done. And it means, friend, that you, need God, to be on your side. And you, need to be on his.

[26 : 15] this is a guarantee, only for God's own people. But it's a guarantee, and an invitation, to everyone out there, that if they come to God, if they ask him, to forgive them, for their mountainous, sins against him, and if they follow him, that this wonderful, perfect, all-encompassing, endless salvation, will be theirs too.

This is the preacher's message. And it's one, that every one of us, needs to respond to, personally. And the fourth, and final aspect, here is the preacher's, motivation.

Now the text, doesn't, address the issue, of the preacher's, motivation, explicitly. But we can see, with confidence, that his motivation, is love.

He loves, first of all, the originator, of the message. God reigns, is the climax, of the message. And the message, has been sent, by God, to reassure his people, that he does indeed reign, and that he will be victorious.

It was Jesus's delight, to do his father's will, because he loved his father. And because he loves, his father, he comes to declare, this great message.

[27 : 37] Then secondly, he loves the message itself. The picture Isaiah gives us, is of this person, coming over the mountains, with great news. And that's not in the sense, of the postman, handing you a letter, which contains wonderful news, that he has no idea about.

But in the sense, of a herald, who knows what he's going to say, who knows what wonderful news, he has, and who knows the delight, and the rejoicing, it will lead to. He's bursting to tell it, because he loves the message.

And from the moment, his earthly ministry began, Jesus preached the message he loved, the message of salvation. And thirdly, he loves the recipient of the message.

The herald that brought news, of the end of captivity to Judah, was bringing the message, to his own people, to his own family, his friends, his neighbors, knowing the joy, and relief, and thankfulness, it would trigger in them, because he felt those emotions, himself.

It would have spurred him on, to get the message home, as quickly as possible, to make sure the message, was delivered, in a crystal clear way, so there could be no mistaking, what he had to say.

[28 : 55] Well, Jesus' motivation is the same. He has made this long, hard journey, to deliver this message, of wonderful, free, lasting salvation, to his own dear people, because he loves them.

Why does he love them? Well, he doesn't love them, for anything in them, or anything that they've done. He doesn't love them, because he foresaw, he foresaw their response, to this message.

He loves them, because he chose to. He loves them, to the extent, that he came, and suffered, and died for them. Not, when they were his people, but as Paul says, while we were still sinners, Christ died, for us.

We have the preacher's identity, journey, message, and motivation. Just one last thing. What about the hearer's, response?

Well, the people, and I see as prophecy, they break into singing, and rejoicing. How about you? How are you responding, to the message, of salvation?

[30 : 13] Christ's message, of salvation, is for every one of us, today. It's for you, if you're not yet a Christian, because you're in a dire, predicament, with only one possible way out.

And the good news, friends, is that, he is offering you, that one way out. You don't have to perform, any heroics, to earn it. You don't have to overcome, the mountain range, of your sin.

You have to admit, to God, that you're a sinner. You have to ask him, to forgive your sins, and trust him, with your whole heart. This is the good news. This, is what leads to peace.

This, is salvation. And it's also, for you as a Christian, here this evening. It's for you, as a Christian, as a reminder, of what lies ahead, with the Lord Jesus, in heaven.

But also, and probably even more so, it's as a reminder, of everything Jesus, has done for you, and what it cost him. If Jesus, has done all of this, for you, if he has traveled, this impossible journey, and died for you, shouldn't you follow, in his footsteps, and live for him?

[31 : 29] This salvation, doesn't depend, on the strength, of your faith, but on the reign, of your God. And that's why, it can't fail. Can you look at the Lord, Jesus Christ, tonight?

Look at his journey, look at all, that he's done, hear his message, think about his motivation, and still, and still reject, the salvation, he offers.

Surely not. Surely, you want to be, set free, from your own, personal captivity. Well, here, here in the Bible, is the key, to freedom.

him. Or, do you look at, the Lord Jesus, tonight? Look at his journey, look at all, that he has done, hear his message, think about his motivation, understand, it was, for you, and break into singing, and rejoicing, saying, how beautiful, upon the mountains, are the feet, of him, who brings, good news.

let's pray. Lord our God, we give thanks, that, the message, of salvation, is as real, and as relevant, as it has ever been.

[33 : 02] We give thanks, that, whilst, the people of Isaiah's time, looked forward, to a freedom, from captivity, which may have been, short lived, that your people, can look forward, to a freedom, from sin, and a freedom, from the punishment, of God, that will never end.

pray, O Lord, that, you would help, each one of us, in here this evening, each one of us, listening, each one of us, worshiping, to respond, in a way, that honors you, and pleases you, and pleases you, to respond, in a way, that seeks, your glory, and that seeks, your salvation, for each of us

personally, give thanks, for the way, you speak to us, in your word, down through, all the generations, and millennia, and pray, that you would have, all the praise, and the glory, Amen. Final singing, is from the, Sing Psalms, version of Psalm 102, Psalm 102, from verse 18, it's page 134, of the, Psalm book, let this be written down, to teach a future race, so people yet unborn, may magnify his grace, that from his holy place, above the Lord, look down, in tender love, from heaven, he viewed the earth, observing all mankind, to hear the groans, of those in prison cells, confined, and to deliver, from on high, a multitude, condemned to die, in Zion, will be praised, the Lord's exalted name, his praises, will be sung, within Jerusalem, when peoples, and their kingdoms, throng, to serve the Lord, with cheerful song, these verses, to God's praise, can conclusion, let this be written down, let this be written down, to teach a future ways so people yet unborn may magnify his grace that from his holy place above the Lord lifted in tender love from heavenly view the earth of serving all mankind to hear the crowds of those in presence shall confine and to deliver from on high a multitude content to die in

Zion will be pleased the Lord's exalted name his praises will be within Jerusalem Jerusalem when peoples and their kingdoms strong to serve the Lord with cheerful song amen come come come thanks for the opportunity we've had to come and worship you together we pray that you would bless each aspect of our worship to us and you would follow us with your blessing you'd speak to us through your word here and as we leave this place we ask that you take us to our homes in safety and the dependence on you and the wicked we've entered!
for Jesus sake Amen