

“Behold Your King Reigns, Bringing Salvation”

Isaiah 52:1-12

March 20, 2016

Awake, awake,

 put on your strength, O Zion;
 put on your beautiful garments,
 O Jerusalem, the holy city;
 for there shall no more come into you
 the uncircumcised and the unclean.

² Shake yourself from the dust and arise;
 be seated, O Jerusalem;
 loose the bonds from your neck,
 O captive daughter of Zion.

³ For thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.” ⁴ For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. ⁵ Now therefore what have I here,” declares the LORD, “seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail,” declares the LORD, “and continually all the day my name is despised. ⁶ Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.”

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
 are the feet of him who brings good news,
 who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
 who publishes salvation,
 who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
 together they sing for joy;
 for eye to eye they see
 the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing,
 you waste places of Jerusalem,
 for the LORD has comforted his people;
 he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm
 before the eyes of all the nations,
 and all the ends of the earth shall see
 the salvation of our God.

¹¹ Depart, depart, go out from there;
 touch no unclean thing;
 go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves,
 you who bear the vessels of the LORD.

¹² For you shall not go out in haste,
 and you shall not go in flight,
 for the LORD will go before you,
 and the God of Israel will be your rear guard. — *Isaiah 52:1-12, ESV*

Introduction: 700 Years Before Christ

So here we are on Palm Sunday and what might be even more unusual and unexpected than the snow on the ground this morning is the fact that your pastor has taken a break from Ephesians to do a special series for Palm Sunday to Easter and we're in Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet. So, what gives? Why Isaiah? Well, I think you'll see clearly as we go through these chapters together this week.

The prophet Isaiah lived and prophesied between the years 760 and 700 BC, more than 700 years before the birth of Christ. This is as distant from the time of Christ as someone living in the 1200's is distant from us today. In the first part of Isaiah, chapter 1-39, Isaiah is mostly calling God's people to repent and prophesying judgment on God's people for their idolatry and wickedness and disaster for other nations who have oppressed God's people. Then, in chapter 40, the text turns to a more positive and hopeful message, beginning with the words, "Comfort, comfort my people."

This change is probably due to Israel, the Northern Kingdom, being conquered by the Assyrians in 722 and being taken off into captivity. Once judgment started coming and God's people started being taken in to captivity, God immediately brings a message of hope, of future redemption and restoration. But this message was woven throughout the earlier sections of Isaiah, too. Ultimately, what is amazing and wonderful about all of these messages of hope and redemption from Isaiah is that they all come together and find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

God gave smaller measures of relief and restoration before Jesus came, in the return from exile to the Promised Land. But that relief was not the final redemption because God's people remained in bondage – they were almost always under the oppressive rule of foreign kingdoms and also remained unfaithful in worship and obedience, as the later prophets of the Old Testament make clear.

So that we would not miss the truth that the promises made in Isaiah were fulfilled in Christ 700 – 800 years later, Jesus began His public earthly ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth by reading Isaiah 61 –

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,*

*and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor (Isaiah 61:1-2a, ESV)*

And then He said, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." And it's not hard to see the connection between this passage of promise in Isaiah and all the rest, that the great promised hope from Isaiah the prophet is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. We looked at Isaiah 9 in December during Advent and Christmas and we saw the clear and specific fulfillment of those verses. Now, at Easter, we're going to be digging into Isaiah 52-53 to see the clear and specific fulfillment of these verses, too.

While our time in Isaiah has to be limited to chapter 9 and chapters 52-53 for now, Jesus fulfills so much more that we just don't have time to cover. So, I have included an extra insert in your bulletin with a detailed list of just some of the specific references to the Messiah and Israel's hope in Messiah and how these things are fulfilled in Christ.

For now, though, let's jump into Isaiah 52, which might not seem to be about Messiah right away, but we'll see that it is ultimately leading us to Him.

I. Deliverance out of Captivity, vv. 1-6

God begins this passage by calling His people to rise up out of their captivity and take their seat as His freed people, redeemed without money and shown the truth of who God is.

A. Get Up and Sit Down! (vv.1-2)

God says: "*Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;
for there shall no more come into you
the uncircumcised and the unclean.*

² *Shake yourself from the dust and arise;
be seated, O Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion.*"

God uses the language of a city to address His people. God does this often in Scripture, addressing His people as Zion or Jerusalem. Zion is the name of the mountain on which Jerusalem was built. But God is not literally talking to a city or a mountain but to His people. His people have suffered oppression and bondage and He is calling them to freedom and dignity and to their rightful place as His own people. They need to get up out of the dust and take the collar of bondage off of their necks. They are free. Even though God says this as a present command, the deliverance is yet to come in the future.

B. Redeemed without Money (v. 3)

³ *For thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.”*

No one paid God anything when they took His people into captivity. And so God says they will be redeemed without money. God is not going to pay anyone anything for the deliverance of His people. This indicates that their deliverance will come some other way.

⁴ *For thus says the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. ⁵ Now therefore what have I here,” declares the LORD, “seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail,” declares the LORD, “and continually all the day my name is despised.”*

Here God is telling us the reason, the motivation, for His coming deliverance of His people. Why is God going to deliver His captive people? It is because they have been oppressed “for nothing” and “taken away for nothing.” And so now the people are in anguish, their rulers wailing, and the name of God is despised, mocked, ridiculed for the weakness and enslavement of His people.

C. Here I am! (v. 6)

Then God tells His people in verse 6 what the result will be of His deliverance of them: *“Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.”*

What’s interesting in verse 6 is that the result of this deliverance is unexpected. Picking up on the end of verse 5, where God was motivated by the dishonor of His name, God says that by bringing deliverance to His people, they shall know His name rightly. To know God’s name is to know His character truly. In fact, they shall know for certain that it is God who speaks and then He says literally, “Behold: I.” Or “Behold: Here I am!”

So, when we look at these first six verses, we have to ask ourselves, what kind of deliverance could this be? What kind of deliverance could free God's people from bondage and give them a place of dignity and honor with God, as His people? What kind of deliverance would bring the people back to God without an exchange of money and would cause them to know God more truly, to know His name/His character, and even to see Him clearly for themselves?

To be able to answer these questions about this kind of deliverance, we have to know a few things first: What is it that truly holds God's people in bondage, a bondage worse than the chains of the Assyrians or the Babylonians? What is it that causes the leaders of God's people to wail to Him? What is it that causes God's people to not know Him well, to not know His name? What is it that causes God's name to be dishonored among the nations? And how has God fully and clearly revealed Himself to His people and to the world?

To answer these questions, we're going to keep going through this passage and see how it connects to Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry.

II. Beautiful Feet, Good News, vv. 7-10

A. Good News: "Your God Reigns!" (vv. 7-8)

How beautiful upon the mountains

*are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

⁸ *The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;*

*together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.*

Now we come to Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry, though it may not look like it clearly yet. Let's think about what's happening on Palm Sunday during Jesus' Triumphal Entry. Jesus comes to Jerusalem on a donkey, in fact on a colt, the foal of a donkey, in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, which was our Call to Worship today:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;

*righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

So, as Jesus is riding into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey, He is coming as the King. The people are shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” “Hosanna” means “save now!” Jesus is coming “having salvation” and He is coming riding on a donkey, which was the mount that a king would use when He enters a city in peace to bring peace. When a king comes to bring war, he rides on a white war horse.

So, in Isaiah 52:7, what is the good news that is being proclaimed? It is “Your God reigns!” And in verse 8, what do the watchmen see which causes them to lift up their voice and sing for joy? They see “eye to eye” – as plainly as can be – the return of the LORD to Zion, to Jerusalem!

Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday to the shouts of “Hosanna!” from the people is a clear proclamation: Jerusalem, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation. He comes to bring you peace. He comes to bring you deliverance. And because of who Jesus is, it further says, “Your God reigns!” This is God riding on the donkey of the King bringing peace. Your God reigns and is coming to Zion and everyone is seeing Him clearly together.

The Pharisees knew the significance of this event and the shouts of the people, which is why they told Jesus to silence His disciples. In Luke 19:39-40, we read: “And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” This event was too important; it had been promised and anticipated for too long. If the people would not cry out the words of salvation and kingship, the stones would have to do it. God would not let this vital, long-awaited coming go unannounced. He had the voices of the angels at His birth and now the shouts of the crowds at His entry into Jerusalem.

B. Comfort & Redemption: God’s Holy Arm (vv. 9-10)

And so Isaiah 52 goes on to say,
“*Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;*”

he has redeemed Jerusalem.

*¹⁰The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.”*

Christ's coming brings the comfort announced back at the beginning of Isaiah 40 because Christ's coming brings the redemption God's people so desperately need and waited for for so long. The salvation comes as the Lord bares His holy arm. Jesus is often referred to as the holy arm, the right arm, the right hand or the arm of the Lord in the Old Testament. The term speaks to His place in heaven, seated at God the Father's right hand, but it also speaks to His origin and nature, He is the arm of the Lord because He is God Almighty and He is how God reaches into this world. This is why He is the LORD returning to Zion, why the redemption he brings is the salvation of our God, why His reign declares so clearly that God reigns.

And yet as clear as God had been in His message and His revelation of Jesus, as clear as the cries of the crowds had been, still the people of Jerusalem missed the true meaning of Jesus' coming. They missed it because they were waiting so long for the redemption of God without ever understanding what redemption they truly needed and what salvation God was going to bring.

The reason the Pharisees wanted the crowd silenced is the same reason why the crowds changed their shouts from "Hosanna" to "Crucify Him!" in just a few short days: They were expecting Jesus to redeem them from Rome, not from themselves. They wanted Jesus to break the chains of Rome, but Jesus had come to break the chains of their own sin. They thought they knew God well enough and just needed political freedom. Jesus knew that they didn't truly know God at all and they needed to be redeemed from their sin and from the alienation from God and their death caused by their sin.

We make the same kind of mistake today: We still are tempted to think that our biggest and most serious problems are external, physical, temporal. We think what we most need is good health or the right job or a better economy or higher self-esteem. But remember the questions we asked earlier:

- What kind of deliverance could free God's people from bondage and give them a place of dignity and honor with God, as His people?

- What kind of deliverance would bring the people back to God without an exchange of money and would cause them to know God more truly, to know His name/His character, and even to see Him clearly for themselves?

Only the death of Jesus in the place of His people on the cross could accomplish this. Only the payment made in blood to appease the justice of God the Father, not a payment in coin made to Rome, could set the people free from their truest bondage and their deadliest chains. Only the death of Jesus on the cross could show them the fullness of God's character – His holiness, His justice, His wrath, His love, His kindness, His mercy, His wisdom, His power, His purposes.

And God didn't want His people to miss it, so Isaiah goes on in the rest of Ch. 52 and in all of 53 to spell this out even more clearly. Here we have but the prelude, the set-up, the explanation of what God is doing. On Maundy Thursday and on Easter Sunday, we'll see the clear fulfillment, the clear accomplished purposes of God. And all of it was told to God's people over 700 years before Jesus was born.

Response: Come Out with Confidence

We have just one more thing to see this morning: The response God's people should have to this great deliverance:

Depart, depart, go out from there;

touch no unclean thing;

go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves,

you who bear the vessels of the LORD.

¹²*For you shall not go out in haste,*

and you shall not go in flight,

for the LORD will go before you,

and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

What should a captive people do when the bonds of their captivity are broken and the ransom for their redemption has been paid? They should go out of the land of their bondage and walk into the freedom that's been purchased for them. God says we can do so slowly, deliberately, confidently, because He is the One who is leading us out – going before us and guarding us from behind. God says that we can go out, we can be pure, we can walk in freedom, under His protection.

Jesus has come. He has accomplished salvation. He has brought us the good news that Our God Reigns because in His death and resurrection, He has purchased our redemption, has brought us peace and freedom, has raised us up from the dust and caused us to sit at His table in His kingdom. He has won the victory. Now we need to walk in the freedom He has won for us, to get out of the dust, to sit in our rightful place, to stop putting back on the chains of our shameful bondage.

Jesus has come. He has accomplished salvation. Let's live in the freedom and joy He has won for us!