

**Becoming Good News Messengers**  
**Isaiah 52:7-10**

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**September 8, 2019**

Imagine with me that you have a job working as an assistant to a scientist in a lab. The scientist is brilliant, and has spent their whole lives researching a cure for cancer. You have recently begun to work for them. One night, you are working later at the lab when you hear a big yell. You rush in to see what's going on. It's the scientist. He looks at you and says, "I've found it. I've found it. I finally found a cure." He shows you his notes and lab results. You begin to feel excitement and joy as you think about the repercussions of this announcement.

But there's one other factor in this story. The scientist suffers from a serious heart condition. They live with a weak heart. As you go back to your desk to tell you family about the news, you hear a crash in the lab. You return to find the scientist laying on the floor gasping. Within moments they die.

You are suddenly faced with informing the appropriate people about the scientist's death. But, you are also the only one who knows that they have just discovered the cure for cancer. What will you do with that news?

Would you keep it to yourself? Would you try to sell it to the highest bidder so you could make the profit? Hopefully, most of us would share this news with everyone – other scientists who can confirm and build on the work; people who have cancer and desperately need a cure. Imagine people's response if they discovered that you had this news but you held it back for a few months, or years or even your whole life.

Well now switch with me from that story to today. Most of us know about some news that is even more important than a cure for cancer. It is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you're a Christian at some point in your life, someone told you this good news. You received it and responded to it. Now you live with all of its benefits.

Yet we may hesitate to share this news with others. Why? We might have forgotten about the good news. We've been so consumed by the busyness of our lives that we have not thought about the good news for a long time. Or we might be unclear about the good news. It might have been a while since we've talked about it. So we're kind of fuzzy on what it's really all about.

Or maybe we're going through the crushing pressure of some trouble in our lives. We struggle just to get through a week. So we're having trouble seeing how the good news helps us. Or we might not be convinced that it's good news. Maybe we view it more as "or else" news. We think the good news is basically "turn to Christ or else you're going to Hell.

So it's kind of good news that we can be saved from Hell. But it's quite a negative motivation. And a lot of people dismiss Hell today or dismiss God. Many others are hostile to any sort of religious claim – so we hesitate to share it.

Where might you be at when it comes to sharing or proclaiming the good news from God? Today, we are going to get a solid reminder about the good news and some of its many blessings. We're focusing on this because our theme for the ministry year of 2019/2020 is "Becoming Good News Messengers." As we approach Vision 2025 and ask God to bring people to us who don't yet know Him, we need to be prepared as Good News Messengers. So today, we're going to review the good news and discover our theme verse for this next year. Then in the next 5 messages we will look at different actions necessary for good news messengers. This is all summarized on that card in your bulletin entitled "Living with Mission in Mind." I hope you will take this and place it on your fridges or somewhere prominent in your home as a reminder to everyone of this calling upon our lives.

Today, we will start with the good news itself. If we're going to be good news messengers, we need to know the good news. We're going to go to the Old Testament to find this. It's a time when God's people, Israel, have been defeated and forcibly exported to captivity in Babylon. This happened because they abandoned God. So He gave them over to their own desires. They discovered that trying to do things apart from Him and in defiance of Him led to their own disaster. Now Jerusalem lay in ruins. Solomon's temple had been burned to the ground. Thousands lived in exile in Babylon. It looked like God had permanently abandoned them.

But through the prophet Isaiah, God sent a message of hope and restoration. Within this message we find the origin of the good news language for the New Testament. So today we will look at some of the pieces of this good news. We will see how it was good news for the exiles. We will see how it is good news for us today. And then we will think about what is our responsibility with this good news.

**Isaiah 52:7-10 (ESV)** (Page 524)

<sup>7</sup>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."

<sup>8</sup>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.

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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

To understand the Isaiah passage, we have to think for a moment of how ancient people communicated. We're used to instantly access information. We can find out what's going on just by turning on our phones or computers. But how did people in ancient times get news and communicate? Well someone had to physically come and either speak the news or deliver a scroll containing the news. Those who verbally delivered news were called heralds or messengers. They might walk, run or ride to a city to deliver news. If the news was for the whole city, they might shout it out while they approached the city. Then the guards or watchmen by the gates would pass on the news. They might send one of their own to give news to the king. Or they might just shout it out. Then people who heard the news would pass it on verbally to the next person until it spread through the whole city.

In Isaiah 52:7, we have a messenger approaching Jerusalem which was surrounded by mountains on the north and east side. So if a messenger came through the mountains, they were coming from the north or east. The exiles had been taken away north and east to Babylon. This messenger brings news from that direction. The fact that he is a single messenger might itself indicate good news. If there were multiple messengers or there was a column of people approaching it may have indicated an army retreating in defeat. But here this messenger comes through the mountains and brings good news. The second half of verse 7 gives us multiple pieces of it.

### **What is the Good News?**

The first piece is **Peace. (52:7)** "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes or proclaims peace. Now what kind of peace is this? It can't be peace from war because the Israelites had already been defeated by Babylon in war. More likely it refers to the Hebrew understanding of peace or shalom. This shalom was a peace that involved much more than ceasing hostilities or absence of conflict. It referred to an overall peace that

surrounded a person. If you experienced shalom you experienced peace and wholeness throughout your life. You were at peace with God, family, in the community and with yourself.

The exiles were not at peace because they were in exile. They were displaced from their homeland and apart from God. But now things would change. They were going to be allowed to return because God had appointed the empire of Persia to defeat the Babylonians. The Persians would allow the Israelite exiles to go back to their homeland.

But the exiles would also experience a renewed peace with God. They were no longer under His judgment. There was no more hostility between them and God because the time had been completed. In a sense, this same peace comes to us through God's good news. God wants us to be whole and experience peace with Him, our family, our community and ourselves. We begin to experience and taste that when we receive the good news for the first time. All of sudden we are at peace with God. The animosity caused by our own sin has been removed because of what God has done through Jesus.

Then Isaiah follows the initial proclamation of peace by asserting that the messenger brings "good news of happiness." It's like he can't emphasize enough about the good news aspect of the message. The messenger brings good news. He proclaims peace and brings good news of happiness. Why repeat this? Maybe to add intensity to the message. He really wants to stress that the good news of this message. It's not "I've got good news and bad news." It's not like a battle report that might say we won the battle but it cost us 500 soldiers. Its good news; peace and more good news.

The next piece of good news is **Salvation** found in the next phrase of verse 7. The messenger brings good news, publishes peace, brings good news of happiness and publishes or proclaims salvation. Well to the exiles, salvation would involve release from the oppression of exile. Many of them would return to their homeland.

What do we think of when we hear the word salvation? God's judgment and the consequences of that? We might think of salvation from Hell. But those only focus on future aspects of salvation. What about salvation for us today? God's salvation does bring us a release today. We are saved from the power of sin's oppression. We are saved from the unfiltered cruelty of the devil and evil against us. We are suddenly placed on the side of the One who opposes the oppressors. God constantly looks out for the poor, vulnerable and weak. When we find ourselves in that state, we can rejoice that God is on our side. So this salvation is much more than saving from Hell. It is a salvation we experience now from the penalty of sin and the oppressors aligned against us.

The messenger brings one more piece of good news at the end of verse 7. **God reigns (52:7)**. He says “to Zion, your God reigns.” Zion is another name for Jerusalem. Now think about this message “Your God reigns” to an Israelite exile living in Babylon. When they looked around, whose God seemed to be reigning? – the Lord, their God or the gods of Babylon? They must have heard the taunts from the Babylonians. “Where is the God of Israel? We have destroyed His temple and He has done nothing to stop us. He is powerless in the face of our great gods.”

But this messenger announces the Lord reigns. It’s not that He stopped reigning for a while or He had been knocked off the supreme throne by the Babylonian gods. His reign was not as obvious for the 70 years of exile. Yet He reigned. It was all part of His plan to humble Israel and show her what life was like apart from God. When it was time, God humbled and defeated the Babylonians by using the Persians. Now the Israelites would see clearly God reigning through their release from captivity. But the Lord reigned throughout their captivity. It just wasn’t as obvious.

You and I need to remember that despite the way things may look, God still reigns. Despite the decisions made by some in government or the victories celebrated by evil, the Lord still reigns. He already rules over every oppression. All the world’s leaders are subject to Him. So we need to live with the confidence that the Lord still reigns and will accomplish His good purposes in our lives.

Then we come to verse 8 where we discover another piece of the good news. But look what happens. Something changes. Verse 8 – “The voice of your (Jerusalem’s) watchmen – they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy.” So the watchmen sing good news together in unison. But what are they singing about? Well someone else shows up on the scene. Not only does this messenger arrive with good news. The watchmen sing because they see with their own eyes the return of the Lord Himself. So the next piece of the good news is **The Return of the Lord. (52:8)**.

Now this would be huge news to the exiles. While they were in Babylon, God sent them a prophet called Ezekiel. In one of Ezekiel’s visions, he sees the glory of the Lord depart from the temple. It was a picture of God leaving the Israelites to themselves because of their choice to leave Him and worship other gods. The exiles lived with that image that the Lord had departed from them. But now these watchmen see the Lord Himself returning to be with His people.

We have seen or heard about the Lord’s return. Jesus came. God returned to be with His people. We look forward to the return of the Lord. We do not go forward based on the ideas of some dead founder. We look forward to His return that we will see with our own eyes. Then all things will be made right. And we will dwell with Him forever.

Then comes verse 9 where things change again. Isaiah speaks but not to the people of Jerusalem; not the watchmen; not to the exiles. He speaks to the ruins of Jerusalem. Remember the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and tore down its walls. They burned the temple. The returning exiles lived among the ruins for a while. Yet Isaiah instructs the ruins themselves to sing. It's like they endured Israel's defeat along with her people. Now they are released from mourning to joy.

The reasons for joy contain more pieces of the Gospel. **Comfort (52:9)**. Verse 9 – “Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people.” The exiles had been forced to endure decades of discomfort. They walked the 4 month journey to Babylon. They had to live in a new city as a subject people. They lost all their property and possessions. They likely lost loved ones in the siege. They suffered much loss. But now the Lord has come to comfort them.

When you and I receive the Gospel, we also receive the consolation and comfort of the Lord. Remember last week's message? “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” When receive God and His good news, we also receive the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

But Isaiah not only encourages the ruins to rejoice because of God's comfort. At the end of verse 9 he gives another reason. “The Lord has redeemed Jerusalem.” **Redemption (52:9)**. To redeem meant to pay the price to release someone from slavery. God redeemed the Israelites from the exile by paying the redemption price which required the defeat of Babylon by Persia. That was ordained and empowered by God. You and I were redeemed from the slave market owned by sin. Jesus paid our redemption price of release with His own blood. So when we receive the good news, God redeems us based on Christ's sacrifice.

There's one more piece of the good news found in verse 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.” **The holy arm of the Lord has been bared to reveal the Lord's saving work**. The arm was the symbol of personal strength and action. A bare arm indicated action without restriction. It was obvious for everyone to see. It was free to move and exercise its strength. So the Lord baring his holy arm pictures the Lord actively at work to bring about the salvation of His people.

It was like the Lord's arm was covered during the time of the exile. It looked like He was inactive because His people were taken captive. But then He uncovered His arm. His people would be released. And everyone would see it.

But there is a huge clue to another baring of the Lord's arm that was coming. This time God's powerful action would come in the most unexpected way. When we think of God baring His arm, it's most natural to think of Him smashing His enemies and those of His people. But look down a few verses in your Bibles to find the arm of the Lord again – Isaiah 53:1. “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.” There's the peace of the good news.

So the next time the Lord would lay bare his holy arm before the eyes of all nations He would do it through a suffering servant, namely His own Son. This time God's reign would not displayed by the immediate overthrow of a superpower. It was displayed through a willing servant who gave this up for others. This is the Gospel according to Isaiah. New Testament writes picked up this language to describe the Gospel to their world. This is just a snapshot of some of the pieces of the good news message.

### **What will you do with the good news?**

If you have not yet done so, you must **Receive it**. You must say this is true. I not only affirm this in my mind, I need to receive God's good news into my life. So I must turn away from doing life apart from God. I must acknowledge I've tried to do it my way and made a mess of things. I need the forgiving, saving and peace-giving work of God in my life. If you put the trust of your life onto Jesus, God will pour His gospel into your through your faith.

**Recall it and revel in it.** We can so easily forget the good news and its ongoing life-changing impact on our lives. So we must remember and experience it and live it out. You might want to join me on Wednesday evenings as we flesh out what it looks like to grow as a Christian and apply the Gospel to all of our lives. A good news messenger proclaims the good news.

**Proclaim it.** (Romans 10:13-15)

### **Romans 10:13-15 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone

preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Do you recognize Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15? But in Romans, Paul is not as much concerned with the content of the good news but the need for messengers to announce it. He did that. He gives God the credit for sending messengers out to continue to herald His good news. This call to be good news messengers remains on your and my life today.

How do we do that? That’s what we’re going to talk about the next 5 messages as we live with this mission in mind. You might also want to join Pastor Serge’s Sunday School class which focuses on proclaiming this good news in a skeptical world.

But for today, if you’re not a Christian, will you receive God’s good news? If you are will you spend some time thanking God for sending a messenger to you to deliver that news? Then ask for His strength to proclaim it to others.