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Isaiah 52:7-12

13th Message

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# BEARERS OF GOOD NEWS

*SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE*

President Bush has declared April 5-7 as National Days of Thanksgiving for the allied victory over Iraq. At 3 p.m. EST today, church bells across the nation will peal to celebrate the liberation of Kuwait and the end of hostilities in the Persian Gulf. Quoting the President:

I ask that Americans gather in homes and places of worship to give thanks to almighty God for the liberation of Kuwait, for the blessings of peace and liberty, for our troops, our families and our nation... We prayed for a swift and decisive victory and for the safety of our troops. Clearly, the United States and our coalition partners have been blessed with both. We thank the Lord for His favor, and we are profoundly grateful for the relatively low number of allied casualties, a fact described by the commanding general as "miraculous." Nevertheless, because each and every human life is precious, we also remember and pray for all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in this conflict... and for the innocent men, women and children, wherever they may be, who have suffered as a result of the conflict in the Gulf.

At the end of our service today, I will lead us in prayer. I agree with the President: we have much to be thankful for. We should be thankful that we have a President who acknowledges the living God, and that we had godly leadership during the crisis. We are thankful for the quick victory, that our nation was unified and was willing to confront injustice. Personally, I thought that God would not only deal with the injustice of the Iraqi takeover of Kuwait, but that he would use the Gulf War to punish the United States for its wickedness. We, too, are fully deserving of the wrath of God. But, in a manifestation of God's grace, what we received was mercy, not wrath. I am reminded of the time when Israel was executing the sword on the Canaanites. God said to them, in effect, "Because you are using the sword, don't think you are more righteous than the Canaanites. You're just as wicked. I'm merely using you as a sword of justice" (Deut 9:5).

We do indeed have much to thank God for. Now we are celebrating the homecoming of our troops to a land awash in yellow ribbons. How different from the homecoming of our Vietnam veterans! Nightly we see the television footage of relatives waiting and watching for their loved ones to return in glory. We see their joyful weeping when at last they are reunited. We can read their eyes: we did it! We have broken the back of the oppressor.

But the elation is dampened, the celebration clouded by a number of facts: Saddam is still in power in Iraq. There is still much conflict and bloodshed in that country as a terrible civil war rages. The Shiite Muslims of the south have been ravaged; in the north, the Kurds are facing annihilation by the forces of Saddam Hussein. The devastation and destruction of both Iraq and Kuwait remind me of the Hebrew word *shamam*—meaning, devastation so horrifying it leaves the onlooker speechless. Even as we celebrate victory we are left to wonder if we will ever have a lasting, permanent peace, when

all conflict and hostilities will end, when nations at last will "turn their swords into plowshares, and never train for war" (Mic 4:3).

Our text this morning, Isaiah 52:7-12, speaks to this very issue. The prophet is writing to a war-torn remnant of Israel, exiled in Babylon (modern-day Iraq), her capital, Jerusalem, lying in ruins, like Bagdad today. To this remnant, therefore, comes this announcement which the Bible calls the gospel (those bearing good news). The New Testament word for gospel, for evangelism, originates right here in this text in Isaiah. It will be helpful to us to uncover the original meaning of this word. In the original context, the word pictures a runner racing home to the capital city to announce the good news of a great military victory. Here the runner's feet are declared to be a pleasant sight as the watchmen on the city wall wait eagerly for the news. And when the runner at last arrives at his destination he comes with good news of peace and well being: the God of Israel has defeated her enemies and has established his rule! The watchmen respond with a shout of unifying joy! This act of salvation and restoration of God's capital city is so glorious and majestic that all the nations witness in absolute awe what God does with Jerusalem. This then is the context of the gospel, the good news.

In our text we will meet the three players in this drama—the messenger, the watchmen, and the nations. Each one of us, depending on where we are spiritually, falls into one of these categories. But the main thrust of our text will answer the very important question: "What does it mean for us to be bearers of good news, to be witnesses for Christ?"

## I. The Messenger of the good news: A runner from battle (52:7-12)

How lovely on the mountains  
Are the feet of him who brings good news,  
Who announces peace,  
And brings good news of well-being,  
Who announces salvation;  
Saying to Zion, "Your God reigns!"  
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices,  
They shout joyfully together;  
For they will see with their own eyes  
When the LORD restores Zion  
"Break forth, shout joyfully together,  
You waste places of Jerusalem;  
For the LORD has comforted His people,  
He has redeemed Jerusalem.  
The LORD has bared His holy arm,  
In the sight of all the nations,  
That all the ends of the earth may see  
The salvation of our God. (NASB)

There we have the first announcement in the Bible of the gospel, the good news.

### A. The message of the good news: A military victory

What kind of news does this runner, this messenger bring from battle? The text speaks of a military victory, using military terminology about a battle fought and won, with the resultant eternal implications.

The word “salvation” refers to God’s people being delivered from enemy rule and being set free. “Peace” is not referring to an armed truce, but to God’s thorough, dramatic defeat of the enemy, with the result that peace is won. The prophet Nahum uses similar terms with reference to the gospel:

**Behold, on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news,**

**Who announces peace!**

**Celebrate your feasts, O Judah;**

**Pay your vow.**

**For never again will the wicked one pass through you;**

**He is cut off completely. (Nah 1:15)**

This is a description of true peace.

The prophet Micah uses even more graphic descriptions. Referring to the Messiah who will be born in Bethlehem, he says,

**And this One will be our peace,**

**When he [Assyria] tramples on our citadels,**

**Then we will raise against them**

**Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.**

**And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword,**

**The land of Nimrod at its entrances;**

**Thus He will deliver us from the Assyrian**

**When he attacks our land**

**And when he tramples our territory. (Mic 5:5-6)**

Assyria, of course, is modern day Iraq. When Messiah comes, says Micah, he will raise up a multitude of leaders who will invade the capital cities of the enemy and defeat them on their own turf. This is true peace, not an armed truce.

This then is the message which the messenger brings: Salvation and peace, with its result, “Your God reigns.” God has established his rule; his sovereignty is fully established.

### B. The fulfillment of the good news: The cross and the resurrection

When we turn to the pages of the New Testament, we find a whole array of messengers whose feet come bearing this good news. The angels, Jesus himself, the apostles, the writers of the NT, all see the fulfillment of this gospel in the work of Jesus the Messiah. I will quote a number of NT texts which use terms drawn from our text in Isaiah:

The angel: “Do not be afraid; for behold I bring you *good news* of great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

Mark: “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the *gospel* of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the *gospel*.’” (Mark 1:14-15)

Peter: “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the *good news of peace* through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” (Acts 10:36)

Paul: “And we preach to you the *good news* of the promise made to the fathers, that God has *fulfilled* this promise to us their children

in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘Thou art My son: Today I have begotten Thee.’” (Acts 13:33)

But, we must ask, what battle did Jesus fight and win that convinced these NT messengers to go forth and announce the good news of peace? The Romans (the new Assyrians), the enemies of Israel, were still in power! Jesus did not defeat them. Nor did he instruct the apostles to take up a sword, go to their capital city of Rome and defeat them. How then could the NT messengers convince Israel that Jesus was the Messiah?

After the resurrection, the apostles finally learned what the prophets were referring to. When they referred to spiritual realities which were yet future, they used historic terms of their own day, casting events in that light, using poetic metaphor. Thus, Rome was too small an enemy for Jesus to take on. This one soldier, Jesus, who had been abandoned by all others, gave himself up to the enemy, to be treated however his enemies wished. On that cross, he himself, not a coalition of allies, dealt with the real enemy, the real power behind the forces of evil—the devil, the world and the flesh. On the cross, Jesus “made a public spectacle of them,” exhibiting them as “the powerless powers” (Col 2:15) they now are. The apostles, who were eyewitnesses to what happened on the cross, were so moved by the defeat of the real enemy their whole lives changed. A flame of love so burned in their souls that everywhere they went they joyfully announced the good news, the gospel. Eventually, every one of them was martyred for telling the news. The tyrant had been defeated. The spiritual enemies of life had been routed. All that remained to be done was a mop-up operation to set free the captives.

By the way, have you noticed that the devil is back in the news lately? He made the cover of *Newsweek* magazine a few weeks ago. Recently, the television programs *Nightline* and *20/20* featured the devil. The latter program showed film of an actual exorcism, done very fairly, I feel, to demonstrate that there are such things as demons, powers that man in his own strength cannot control. Only the Savior can release us from such bondage.

### C. Implications for modern-day messengers

What are the implications of this text for Christians today? First, I would say that believers need to rid themselves of the old caricature of what witnessing actually involves. Here is what I think is a typical caricature of witnessing: Witnesses are religious salesmen who venture forth from known and familiar territory to arenas unknown; and then, with great boldness and an utter lack of tact and sensitivity, impose their religious opinions upon people they’ve never met. Their method is answering questions no one is asking, using religious jargon no one understands. Their goal is to have people feel that their lifestyle is offensive to them, but this could be alleviated by their attending their church.

We desperately need to rid ourselves of this baggage. Witnesses are not salesmen who have memorized several steps which they are ready to recite to the first person who comes along. On the contrary, they are eyewitnesses to something that has touched them personally, something that has made them radically new people. Having been a spectator to the great acts of God they share their firsthand experiences of how God defeated the enemy in their lives. Their minds have been touched; their whole disposition changed. The problem with Christianity today is that not enough Christians have truly seen the cross. We haven’t looked at its power. We haven’t sat under its authority. That is why our lives have not changed. Thus our witnessing impresses no one. The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones objected to

training methods in evangelism. He said, "I never trained a single convert how to approach others, but they did so...the best witnesses are the best Christians." The key to being a witness for Christ is to be an eyewitness who has experienced his wonderful delivering power.

Finally, witnessing should not be reserved for the professionals. All are called! The early church did not organize meetings and hire professional witnesses. They had an army of witnesses, all of whom were touched by the cross of Christ and were ready to share the good news that had so utterly changed their hearts and lives. In fact, as the book of Acts records, to make witnessing more effective in the early church, God locked up the professionals in prison. "Now that I am in prison," wrote Paul to the Philippians, "you are much bolder in your presentation of the gospel." In his Ephesian letter, in a direct quote of Isaiah 52:7, Paul says that part of every believer's suit of armor in waging spiritual warfare is "feet shod with the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15). This implies that every believer should be poised as a messenger to proclaim the good news of the kingdom in any setting, even in the very strongholds of Satan. The good news empowers us to enter into enemy territory and defeat him on his own turf. Witnessing is not what you do, it is what you are. So put your shoes on!

To summarize, a witness is an eyewitness of God's salvation. He is so touched in mind and heart that he shoes his feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

## II. The recipients of the good news: The Watchmen (52:8-9)

### A. The joy of the watchmen: Witnessing the restoration of Jerusalem

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices,  
They shout joyfully together;  
For they will see with their own eyes  
When the LORD restores Zion  
Break forth, shout joyfully together,  
You waste places of Jerusalem;  
For the LORD has comforted His people,  
He has redeemed Jerusalem.

In chapter 62, Isaiah has a further word about these watchmen:

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen,  
All day and all night they will never keep silent.  
You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves;  
And give Him no rest until he establishes  
And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Isa 62:6-7)

As the messenger comes into the city with the news of victory, God has appointed eager watchmen, a faithful remnant who never forsook the God of Israel or gave up hope. As they see the messenger coming they give a resounding shout of joy. Peace had been won, and in peacetime the ruined Jerusalem could be rebuilt. They would see with their own eyes the restoration of Zion. Jerusalem was to be "the desire of all nations." One of the rabbis wrote: "The world is like unto an eye. The ocean surrounding the world is the white of the eye; its black is the world itself; the pupil is Jerusalem; but the image within the pupil is the sanctuary."

### B. The watchmen in the NT rejoice over the new Jerusalem

Likewise, when we turn to the New Testament, the messengers of the good news are greeted by watchmen who had been prepared by God. Simeon was worshiping in the temple when the baby Jesus was brought for dedication. He is described by Luke (2:25-35)

as the first watchman, who was "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel." Note how closely Simeon's prayer mirrors Isaiah 52:8:

**"Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart  
In peace, according to Thy word;  
For my eyes have seen Thy salvation,  
Which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
A light of revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Thy people Israel."** (Luke 2:29-32)

Luke then proceeds to tell us about another watchman, Anna, a prophetess. She approached to see Jesus and praise God just after Simeon's prayer.

Watchmen represent all who long for salvation and eagerly keep watching and waiting for the Lord to fulfill his word. Throughout the Scriptures we find that God always prepares a remnant who will hear the word of the messenger. When they meet, there is always a shout of joy, for God is restoring Jerusalem.

The Jews, however, would question whether this good news was true. If Jesus was the Messiah, and he had destroyed the enemies of Israel and restored Jerusalem, how was it that the Romans still controlled the city, and they sacked and utterly destroyed it in AD 70. We can see the fulfillment of the restoration of Jerusalem beginning with the resurrection of Christ. Jesus did not go to Rome to defeat the enemy; he descended into hell to defeat the real enemy. At Easter, then, the first shout of victory is given as the foundation stone of a new temple in a new and greater Zion is laid. This is a Jerusalem "made without hands, eternal in the heavens, descending from heaven." Jesus himself, raised from the dead, is the Cornerstone of that new city; its foundation is made up of the apostles and prophets; and living stones, believers in Christ, are crafted and fitted into the building of the city. These shouts of joy that are made whenever a watchman enters the city will continue until that great day when the New Jerusalem is at last complete and it descends from heaven with a shout (Matt 25:6; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10)! Hebrews reminds us, "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb 12:22).

### C. Implications for modern-day messengers

Witnessing is supernaturally governed and guided. We must not destroy our witness by turning it over to marketing experts. The fact that the first witnesses were angels ought to indicate that all witnessing is the activity of angels putting together divine encounters. God prepares the watchmen. We don't have to go door to door; we go to hearts that are already prepared. This is what we find all through the gospels and the book of Acts. Jesus didn't go from house to house in Samaria. He introduced himself to a woman whom God had prepared; then she in turn shared with others. Philip was directed by an angel to go to Gaza, a ruined desert city. There, an Ethiopian eunuch, an official in the court of Queen Candace, was awaiting the evangelist in a divine encounter. He had come to Jerusalem looking for salvation, but had found nothing. Returning home in his chariot, he stopped in Gaza, and there was reading Isaiah 53, seeking to understand it, when along came Philip to explain the text to him (Acts 8). In the desert, not in Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem came to earth. This man became the first African convert; then the angel whisked Philip away as if to say Philip's job was done and that the Spirit would be in charge of the follow-up. How encouraging!

All witnessing is like this—a series of divine encounters. When you go to work tomorrow, be aware that angels go with you. Maybe this coming week you will meet a watchman, longing for salvation, in a divine encounter.

Once the runner reaches the capital city, a shout of resounding joy comes forth from those who have long waited for God's salvation. The messenger is the bearer of the good news; the recipients are the watchmen waiting on the walls.

And third, there is an audience to everything that is going on.

### III. The audience who witness the good news: The nations (57:10)

The LORD has bared His holy arm,  
In the sight of all the nations,  
That all the ends of the earth may see  
The salvation of our God.

#### A. The majesty of salvation powerfully displayed: Like the first Exodus

The picture being drawn here portrays that the salvation of the liberated city will become public knowledge, even to the ends of the earth. All the nations will see the salvation of God's people, and they will have to make a decision regarding it. The figure of the Lord's arm is an anthropomorphism which depicts his majestic power in deliverance. "By throwing back His encumbering royal robe the Lord made bare his arm to fight majestically" (Bruce Waltke). Just as the Lord displayed this majestic power in the Exodus (Exod 6:6; 15:6; Deut 4:34; Ps 77:15), so will his power will be seen in all its majesty when he brings about our final redemption in Christ. The book of Colossians says, "and He has taken it [the certificate of debt] out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col. 2:14-15).

#### B. The majesty of salvation universally acknowledged: Greater than the first Exodus

Throughout church history, God sets the stage in restoring this beautiful city. He uses the nations as the audience who behold the beauty of Zion, and they stand in awe. On the day of Pentecost, according to Acts, "there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). We have already spoken of the Ethiopian eunuch's encounter with Philip. Then, in Acts 13:46-48, the Gentiles upon hearing the good news of salvation, "began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Paul foretells the final day when all the nations will recognize that salvation comes through Christ, and that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

Finally, when the new Jerusalem has descended and all things are made new, the nations will take their place as citizens of the celestial city: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...and the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it" (Rev 21:1, 24).

Because the majesty of this great news shall be universally acknowledged, the implication is clear: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20).

#### C. Implications for modern-day messengers

Believers should not make the mistake of thinking they must set the stage for witnessing. God is the one responsible for that. When we set the stage, and invite the audience, hoping for someone to come to Christ, we get so caught up in the planning and marketing that there is no beauty in Zion to attract anyone.

I made that mistake when I was college pastor. A liberal pastor had addressed a certain dorm on campus, and had great success. Hearing this, I arranged with a friend to be invited to the same dorm to address the students on apostolic Christianity. On the evening of my talk, as I was ascending the stairs to the dorm, fully three-quarters of the students were coming down the steps, all of them dressed in black. They walked in procession over a hill, and stopped by the side of a small lake on campus. "What's going on?" I asked my friend. "My roommate's goldfish died," he told me, "and he's having a funeral for it." My gospel talk had been upstaged by a dead goldfish!

I did not learn my lesson, however. A year later, I asked another Christian friend, who was having a wonderful ministry with Jews on campus, to invite me to speak on the topic, "Christianity is Jewish." I was setting the stage once more, hoping to lead people to Christ. On the night of the talk, however, no one came. But God in his grace gave me another chance. The following year I was meeting each week with a rabbi on campus to read the Hebrew Bible. He told me he was planning an evening around the topic, "The Five Views of Jesus as Messiah," and he asked to me share my views. On the evening of my talk, 300 people were present. The implication is clear: don't set your own stage! Allow God to do that for you.

A careful look at this text reveals what is our role and what is God's role in witnessing. First, God's role:

God wins the battle;  
God prepares the watchman;  
God rebuilds the city;  
God sets the stage for the nations behold its majesty.

What is our role?

We see;  
we run;  
we announce;  
we shout;  
we stand in awe.

At noon today, stop and give thanks, for God has graced us. Then, look beyond the kingdoms of men, to the heavenly kingdom, where the real battle was fought and won by that one Soldier. He is the one who made everlasting peace. One day, a new Jerusalem will descend from heavens and all the nations will walk by its light. Then, men will turn their swords into plowshares, and never again will they train for war. Amen.

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