



Sermon Growth Guide

December 25, 2022

The Great Rescue - How Beautiful

Isaiah 52:7-10

Key Verse: Isaiah 52:7 “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say on Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

Big Idea: We have a beautiful message from a loving Messenger to celebrate! .

Foundations

We’ve made it through the Christmas season! Gifts have been purchased, wrapped and given. Gatherings have been attended and decorations strung. We’ve worshiped together and lit candles. We’ve cooked and baked and eaten.

And now, on Christmas Day, we ponder the beauty of what God has done for us, and how our lives will forever be different because of His Great Rescue.

The prophet Isaiah did more than address his nation’s sin that grieved God. He was also a messenger of hope, assuring his people that the day was still coming when God’s promised Messiah would come.

Have you ever waited so long for someone you’re meeting to arrive, that you eventually begin to conclude he/she isn’t coming? While we’re blessed to look back upon Jesus’ entrance into our world, Isaiah’s audience was still awaiting this arrival. Because this had been the case for a very long time, it was easy to begin thinking it wasn’t going to happen.

These words are part of Isaiah’s larger message to his people: that God was still on the move to save His people, and it would be beautiful. And because Jesus entered our world, we can celebrate today!

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Isaiah 52:7-10.

Isaiah writes here of a messenger bringing good news. Who are other messengers of good news that we read about in the nativity story?

What different messages of good news do you see in 52:7—and what do each of these messages mean for you?

How do the recipients respond to this news in 52:8?

Applying God’s Word

What does Jesus’ arrival in this world communicate to you personally, from God? What message do you hear from Him through this event?

Isaiah writes that the recipients of this good news will one day see it with their eyes—yet they’re already rejoicing. How do you nurture your faith in what God will yet do even when you’ve not yet seen it come to fruition?

Witnessing God’s Word

With whom can you share in the week ahead your joy at what the message of Christmas means for you?

One of my favorite TV shows while growing up was “Gilligan’s Island.” It was a story of seven individuals who took a three-hour boat tour on the SS Minnow and became shipwrecked on an uncharted, deserted island in the Pacific. Despite repeated and comical attempts to escape this island, each episode concluded with them still there. Others washed ashore at times . . . and left without them. The Air Force actively monitored the island in one episode when it was used for missile testing, but no one looked closely enough to see them. A NASA camera on its way to Mars fell onto the island and observed them, but no one was curious enough to follow up. For three years and 98 episodes, the longing and best efforts of these seven to be rescued from this island resulted in no change.

This show is older than I prefer to admit, but I couldn’t help but think of it while preparing this sermon. Like these castaways, we sometimes find ourselves wishing to be rescued from something, and our best efforts fall short. Perhaps we long to escape a persistent illness, or particularly bleak season in life. Or maybe we long to escape feelings of loneliness and relational isolation. Perhaps we long to escape qualities about ourselves that we don’t like, or wish were different.

Then there’s our spiritual dilemma: our sin condition that separates us from God. Despite our best efforts, we’re unable to make things better and restore this relationship with our Creator.

Friends, our joyful celebration on Christmas Day is that we have a rescuer! One who loves us so much and who understood our limitations, He did for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves.

Today’s text contains three elements, beginning with **The Messenger** (Isaiah 52:7a). Isaiah writes of one who brings good news, and messengers played a significant role in the nativity story. After 400 years of silence from God, multiple messengers began declaring His good news. An angel told Zechariah he would have a son named John. The angel Gabriel informed Mary she would give birth to Jesus. An angel confirmed Mary’s story with Joseph, that God was sending the long-awaited Savior. And an angel informed the shepherds of Jesus’ birth.

Long before those messengers, the prophet Isaiah played a similar role. In addition to addressing his nation’s sin, Isaiah was a messenger of hope. He assured his people the day was coming when God’s promised Messiah would arrive, and all would be made right.

Isaiah writes in today’s passage that day would be like a messenger bringing good news to a waiting city. When cities went to war, messengers played a pivotal role by keeping city leaders informed of what was happening far away. So, cities anxiously awaited such news; they understood that they’d be impacted by whether the news was good or bad. Isaiah used this familiar experience to

assure his readers: good and beautiful news was coming!

The NIV translates Isaiah's words as the "feet of those" plural, "who bring good news." However, the original wording was masculine singular, or "How beautiful the feet of he who brings good news." In other words today, "How beautiful the baby!" For Isaiah was looking ahead to the arrival of one we now look back upon, as the fulfillment of this promise. He was anticipating the one who would leave heaven and enter our world to execute **The Great Rescue**. And so Isaiah writes, "How beautiful are the feet of the one who brings good news."

Beauty is on display in many ways this time of year. Lights and decorations are placed on our homes and trees. Gifts are beautifully wrapped. We've enjoyed the beauty of Christmas Joy and raising a candle on Christmas Eve. But none of these have lasting beauty; we'll soon move on from these and other displays of Christmas beauty for another 11 months.

In contrast, the beauty of Jesus and what He's introduced into our lives lingers beyond this season. For this messenger from God changed everything. And so, how beautiful the arrival of God's messenger, Jesus Christ, into this world.

The second element of our passage is **The Message** (Isaiah 52:7). Important as messengers were, what was valued most was the news they communicated. The word "tidings" was a common way of describing news

in Isaiah's day—and he declared that this messenger would bring very good news. "Peace!"—conflict has come to an end, and things are settled. "Good tidings!"—there's no bad news on the horizon to cloud this moment. "Salvation!"—the power of the oppressor has been broken, and those in bondage freed. "Your God reigns!"—God's ruling power and authority have been established over the enemy. This was Isaiah's promise of what was to come, and our celebration today of what God has done.

Earlier this year, my wife Deborah and I became grandparents for the first time. Iona is now seven months old, and with the bias of every grandparent, I'm convinced she'll have great intelligence and a bright future ahead. But with everything Iona has going for her, she doesn't yet know how to talk and communicate clearly.

I share that to make a point: though Jesus entered our world fully God, He couldn't speak at His birth. We received no verbal message from Him the night He arrived. But here's the important thing: Jesus' arrival was the message. His coming declared in ways that have reverberated down through history: God has entered this world! Our Creator's love for us has been tangibly revealed for all to see. Jesus' arrival proclaimed a message that still impacts today: the great rescue had begun. That's why we sing today of tidings of comfort and joy.

Today I'd like to offer you a Christmas gift. At other times of the year, it would be called homework—but we

don't do homework on Christmas! Here's what I'd like to invite you to do: find a couple minutes sometime today and ponder, **What does Jesus' arrival in this world communicate to you personally, from God?** What message do you hear from God through this event? Try to listen for it even in the busyness of the day.

Then there's the third element of our Christmas passage: **The Response** (Isaiah 52:8-9). Isaiah describes the growing response to this messenger's good news. The watchmen on the city's walls, positioned to first see the messenger's arrival, are the first to respond. Isaiah tells us they lift their voices and shout together for joy at the messenger's news and what it meant for them. But the response doesn't stop there. It spreads until the very ruins of the city are celebrating this good news, that God has comforted His people and brought redemption.

Isaiah adds an interesting note about this moment that he envisions; I wonder if you caught it. After describing the joy of the watchmen at the messenger's news, he adds: "When the Lord returns, they will see this with their own eyes". In other words, they hadn't yet fully experienced this good news. They simply had the messenger's assurance it was on the way, and that was enough to bolster their faith and prompt rejoicing.

So it is with us. We don't yet fully see all that God's Great Rescue will bring about. Sin still has its grip upon our lives and this world. Things are not as

we would like them to be. But we're grounded in confidence that **The Great Rescue** has begun, and it will be fulfilled. Isaiah writes in verse 10, "The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." One day everything will be made right in this world, and every knee will bow in humble response to our Lord and Creator. Until that day, we live in faith, bolstered by Jesus' coming, rejoicing in His assurance of what still lies ahead. For God has entered our world. He has begun the process of redeeming His creation. He is with us!

So, with this Christmas worship, we join the chorus of rejoicing described by Isaiah that's continued down through the centuries. We celebrate peace! Good tidings! Salvation! Our God reigns! Jesus has entered our world to bring about God's Great Rescue. And friends, that's worthy of our joyful response of celebration today!