

OT LESSON #39

“HOW BEAUTIFUL UPON THE MOUNTAINS”

by Ted L. Gibbons

Reading: Isaiah 50-53; Mosiah 14, 15

INTRODUCTION: I asked my institute students if they had beautiful feet. They thought I had gone mad, of course, but the question was asked in perfect seriousness. Isaiah’s poetic imagery about the messengers of the atonement includes the moving assurance that those who carry such a message have beautiful feet. In Isaiah’s time, messages were always carried by runners, and he described those privileged to carry the most meaningful of messages as having beautiful feet.

The following verses give show the honor associated with carrying good tidings, and the way in which they were carried.

Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies. And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead. Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cush. And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.

And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings (2 Sam. 18:19-27).

Another example:

In 490 BC the Athenians had miraculously defeated a much stronger force of invading Persians on the Plains of Marathon. Pheidippides was selected to carry the good news back to Athens. The fleet runner ran the grueling 25 miles as fast as he could. Upon reaching the walls of the Acropolis, Pheidippides cried out, "Rejoice, we conquer!" and promptly fell dead. (Webster's Word Histories, p. 291).

It with this spirit and determination that we ought to carry this message to the world.

1. ISAIAH SPEAKS OF MESSENGERS WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem (Is. 52:7-9).

Notice in the verses above the words that describe the message being delivered: words like *peace, good tidings, good tidings of good, salvation*. What words describe the reaction of those who receive the message? *lift up the voice, sing, see eye to eye, break forth into joy, sing together*.

Have you ever seen people react to the good news of the gospel in this way? Have you ever had such feelings about the mission and message of Christ yourself? There are no better tidings, no messages more able to singing and rejoicing than this message!

In early October of this year, during General Conference, we will have the

privilege of sitting at the feet of men and women with beautiful feet for two days. They will bear testimony of the atonement and teach the eternal truths that will guide us back into the presence of the Father.

Over 60,000 men and women now carry this message to nearly every part of the world, but they must not be left to do it alone. All of us need to increase the attractiveness of our feet.

2. ISAIAH PROPHECIES OF THE SAVIOR'S ATONING SACRIFICE.

Speaking Messianically, Isaiah paints a word-picture that I find more stirring and moving than any Old Testament testimony of the Atonement. That portrait is composed of several parts.

- A. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

In the face of the greatest agony ever inflicted, confronted with what Elder Maxwell called the "awful arithmetic" of an atonement" (Neal A. Maxwell, For the Power is in Them, Dedication), the Savior had reasons to "turn away back" and to rebel against the duty assigned him, but he did not. Even though he was "sorrowful, even unto death" (see Matt. 26:38), and even though he asked the Father to find another way and to remove the cup from him (see Matt. 26:39), still he went forward when he knew it was the Father's will.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 28).

- B. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting . . . (Is. 50:6).

The verb at the beginning of this verse is important: "I gave my back . . ." I am certain that Romans who abused and mistreated the Messiah, and the leaders of the Jews who smote him and spit upon him thought he had no choice in the matter. But he did. His suffering from first to last was voluntary. Nephi said,

And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men (1N. 19:9).

Note that he *suffered* it, not simply endured it. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter tried to defend Christ with the sword, the Lord said to him,

Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matt. 26:52,53).

For an interesting note on the shame of having hair removed, see 2 Samuel 10:4, 5.

C. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed (Is. 50:7).

The phrase in this verse that teaches me most is this one: "I have set my face like a flint." Flint is of course hard and inflexible. I believe this verse refers to the Savior's feelings as he set himself to go to Jerusalem for the final time. He knew what would happen there, of course, but refused to be turned out of his path, no matter how difficult it was.

But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:50).

He knew that the Jews wanted to take him (John 7:30) and kill him (John 7:1), and refused to accompany his kinsman to the Passover feast in Jerusalem.

But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret (John 7:10).

Flint indeed!

- D. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished (Is. 51:6).

The atonement is more durable than planets and stars. It is infinite and eternal.

For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice (Alma 34:10).

And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal (Alma 34:14).

How infinite. Elder Nelson said

His Atonement is infinite . . . in that all humankind would be saved from never-ending death. It was infinite in terms of His immense suffering. It was infinite in time, putting an end to the preceding prototype of animal sacrifice. It was infinite in scope—it was to be done once for all. And the mercy of the Atonement extends not only to an infinite number of people, but also to an infinite number of worlds created by Him. It was infinite beyond any human scale of measurement or mortal comprehension. (Russell M. Nelson, “The Atonement,” Ensign, Nov. 1996, 35).

- E. Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people . . . (Is. 51:22).

The Savior will in different roles at the time of the judgement. He will be a judge (2 Nephi 9:41; Is. 50:5) for all and a prosecuting attorney for the wicked (D&C 19:16,17), but for the righteous he will take the responsibility of

a defense attorney, pleading our cause before the Father.

Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him-- Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life (D&C 45:3-5).

And notice that he pleads for us on the basis of his righteousness, not ours. Thus Lehi tells Jacob, one of the most righteous men that ever lived, "Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer . . ." (2N2:3).

F. Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again (Is. 51:22).

This cup the Savior has taken from us must be the cup of justice. We all deserve to drink it for "all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But Christ, in his agony in the Garden and on the cross, took that cup from us and drank it.

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit--and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink--(D&C 19:16-19).

He has required us to drink a cup in its place, the sacramental cup, a cup of remembering wherein we recall and reflect upon what he has done for us.

G. For thus saith the LORD, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money (Is. 52:3).

The price for our redemption is a debt we cannot pay. Therefore we are not

required to. We “shall be redeemed without money.” Or, as Lehi said, “Salvation is free” (2N2:4) Nephi said of the Lord

Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men . . . (2N26:27).

You can read more about this in Isaiah 55:1,2; Romans 3:23,24; and Romans 10:1-4).

H. I believe that Isaiah 53 is the greatest Old Testament witness of the Atonement. Isaiah’s question at the beginning of the chapter is arresting.

WHO hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? (Is. 53:1).

Isn’t he asking us if we are able to see the arm of God in the live of Christ? Does not the divinity of his message and ministry and miracles speak to you from the accounts of his mortal ministry. It is not his appearance that holds our attention,

For he shall grow up . . . as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him (Is. 53:2)

And we will not be drawn to him by his popularity.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were [our] faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Is. 53:4).

But he will nevertheless make possible our redemption.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and

with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Is. 53:4-12)

These verses are worth volumes of commentary. I have neither time nor space. Read them over quietly and prayerfully to yourself and let the power of Isaiah's testimony teach you.

3. ISAIAH DESCRIBES SOME OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES.

As he describes some of the many things the Savior has done for us, Isaiah also refers to things we are obligated to do.

- A. Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people (Is. 51:4)

This is the call for all to listen—the people and the nation. His laws will light the way for all men.

- B. Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart [is] my law . . . (Is. 51:7).

Even the most righteousness among us must hearken. No matter that we are nearly perfect, or that we have heard it all before. When he speaks (or when his servants speak as they will on Oct 5 & 6), we must hearken.

- C. . . . fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings (Is. 51:7).

Could the possibility of being reproached or reviled cause us to fear, to keep our mouths closed (D&C 60:2), to fail to stand as a witness (Mos. 18:9). Certainly not!

I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass . . . (Is. 51:12).

- D. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old . . . (Is. 51:9)

Questions by Elias Higbee: What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52d chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy strength, O Zion--and what people had Isaiah reference to? (D&C 113:7)

He had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a

right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost (D&C 113:8).

Joseph told us that at least in part this verse refers to putting on the power and authority of the priesthood. Of course not everyone who has been ordained to the priesthood power, for “there are many called, but few are chosen.”

And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson-- That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness (D&C 21:34-36).

These verses seem to tell us that putting on the strength or power of the priesthood is inseparably connected to our righteousness

E. Awake, awake, stand up . . . (Is, 51:17).

We, like Jerusalem, must stand up. We must come out of obscurity and darkness (D&C 1:30; 109:73). If we are crawling or sitting around, no one will know. We must stand up, or, to follow the lead of our Prophet leader, we must stand for something. We must stand a little taller.

F. Awake, awake . . . O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city . . . (Is 52:1).

We must make ourselves attractive so that the honest in heart will come to us to seek blessings and power and joy. This also is a part of bringing the church out of obscurity and darkness. Isaiah said

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Is. 61:10).

G. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion (Is. 52:2).

I wonder if this dust is the filth of the world. The prodigal son, when he had abandoned the pigs and completed the journey home, was given the “best robe” (see Luke 15:22). We are commanded to employ the blessings of the Sabbath to “more fully keep [ourselves] unspotted from the world” (D&C 59:9). Lehi told his sons to “arise from the dust . . . and be men . . .” (2N1:21).

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD (Is. 52:11).

We must turn off the TV more often, and walk out of the movies when they offend the Spirit. We must close our ears and our eyes and our doors to the filth that invades our lives, even our homes.

CONCLUSION: These are all messages worth sharing, and the most important is the message of the atonement. Perhaps each morning as we bend to put on our shoes, we should take a moment to look at our feet. Are they beautiful like the feet of Isaiah and Abinadi and your missionary sons and daughters and brothers and sisters? How long has it been since you told someone what you know about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us?

Copyright © 2002 by Ted Gibbons <tedgibbons@yahoo.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.