

# Christians, Your God Reigns

*From Isaiah*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 52:7

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Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 52. The text which is before us is verse seven of Isaiah chapter 52. Hear God's Word.

How lovely on the mountains  
Are the feet of him who brings good news,  
Who announces peace  
And brings good news of happiness,  
Who announces salvation,  
And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"<sup>1</sup>

Would you pray with me, please?

*Father in heaven, we are grateful for your grace. We thank you for Jesus Christ who is Lord. We thank you that you are the Creator and the Redeemer. We thank you that you call us together as your Church. We give you praise that by your Spirit you do, indeed, implant faith within our hearts. We thank you that you give us the Spirit of grace so that we might raise our voices to you in praise. And we thank you for this message that you do, indeed, reign, that you are supreme, that you are above all and over all. And we thank you in that light, Father, that we are your creatures.*

*We thank you that we are called together this morning to look into your Word. And we pray now that you would be pleased to grant us your grace. We pray for encouragement from your Word, that we might understand any duty we have as your Church is bound up in this message that Jesus Christ is Lord. And so be pleased now to bless us, strengthen us and encourage us we pray in the good name of Jesus Christ who is, indeed, Lord of all. We pray in his name. Amen.*

As I began my ministry in the pastorate a number of years ago I came to a congregation where a group of people had come out of a more liberal context. They were quite independent of spirit. As a result, controversy arose in the congregation. One Sabbath morning when I went to the study to pray with the leaders, gathered as our custom was to

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

pray together, I said to these church leaders, “Do you realize that the controversy that we are in is a work of the devil and the devil is having his way?” One of the men in the congregation, a leader in the congregation, looked me square in the eye and said to me, “Denny, you are the chief instrument of the devil in this congregation.” I was taken back a little.

But in that context I had to go out and lead worship in the congregation and preach the Word of God. In such circumstances, how do you do this? You need to know that Jesus Christ is Lord. You need to understand that he is the King of all and that as the pastor you are not in control. You need to understand the leaders of the church are not in control. Jesus Christ is the King and the Lord of all. It is him whom you serve. And without this, as a church, we have nothing.

The message coming to us this morning from Isaiah chapter 52 and verses seven is this very message. You must take encouragement and I must take encouragement from the message that Jesus Christ is the Lord. Any beauty that you have or any beauty that I have is bound up in this message that Christ is Lord. As a church, the beauty you have is in this message: Jesus Christ is Lord. And so this is the point that I want you to get this morning. Take encouragement from God’s Word; understand the beauty you have before God is in the message that Christ is Lord. Be encouraged; your beauty is in the message that Christ is Lord.

As you look at Isaiah chapter 52 and verse seven the message really comes at the end of the verse. “And say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”<sup>2</sup> This is the message the messenger brings, “Your God reigns.”<sup>3</sup> To put it very literally, the message is: God is King. There is no president, there is no prime minister, there is no senator, there is no congressman, there is no governor, there is no cabinet, there is no other being who is above Christ as King. He reigns.

Would you not agree with me that it is rather unfortunate that an editor of a very prominent news magazine, in these past days, announced that the president of the United States is somehow above America, above the world, above the world as God? Would you not agree with me that that is rather an error in thinking? God is King and there is none other above him. And you must realize this and I must realize this. This must come home to our hearts, to your heart and to my heart. In a way we must realize that we are but worms before God. And, as Calvin might put it, if you would lift up a rock and look under that rock and see those little crawling creatures, this is our place before God who is so great.

Now, as you look at the context of our text this morning, you see that the context is the Babylonian captivity. It is not only the Babylonian captivity but also the release of the captives. Isaiah is looking ahead. Isaiah lived long before the captivity. But now, in our chapter this morning, he is looking ahead to the time of the captivity. And he is not only

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

looking ahead to the time of the captivity, he is also looking ahead to the time of the release of the captives. Look, if you would, at the verses two and following.

Shake yourself from the dust, rise up,  
O captive Jerusalem;  
Loose yourself from the chains around your neck,  
O captive daughter of Zion.<sup>4</sup>

Quite plainly, Isaiah is looking ahead to the captivity; but he is also looking ahead to the time of redemption, to the time of the release from the Babylonian captivity.

Verses three and four.

For thus says the LORD, “You were sold for nothing and you will be redeemed without money.” For thus says the Lord GOD, “My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there; then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.”<sup>5</sup>

In the history of Israel they were captives in Egypt and then they came up out of captivity. They were redeemed and brought into the Promised Land. And then, because of their sin, the Assyrians came. The text says, “My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there; then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.”<sup>6</sup>

Well, on God’s part there was cause for the people to be taken into captivity, to be dispersed by the Assyrians. They were in sin and the Northern Kingdom was decimated. But from the Assyrian perspective there was no reason for them to come in and take captive the people of Israel. They did it without cause. They did it because of their greed and their desire for conquest. And this is what the text is teaching us.

Verse five. “‘Now therefore, what do I have here,’ declares the LORD, ‘seeing that My people have been taken away without cause?’”<sup>7</sup> Now the Babylonians come. The Babylonians had a scorched earth policy. They were desirous of simply dominating others. They came to Palestine after conquering others. They came in to the Promised Land and conquered Jerusalem. And it was, from God’s perspective, because the people had fallen into deep sin. But from the Babylonian perspective they did it without cause. They had no just cause to do this. And so we see here the context of the captivity.

But look at the other side of our text. Verses eight through 12.

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices,  
They shout joyfully together;  
For they will see with their own eyes

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 52:2.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 52:3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 52:4.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 52:5.

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.  
Depart, depart, go out from there,  
Touch nothing unclean;  
Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves,  
You who carry the vessels of the LORD.  
But you will not go out in haste,  
Nor will you go as fugitives;  
For the LORD will go before you,  
And the God of Israel will be your rear guard.<sup>8</sup>

Here is the redemption of God's people. The people are to go back to Jerusalem to reestablish the worship of God, the proper worship of God. This is the essence of verse 11. "Depart, depart, go out from there."<sup>9</sup> Go out from Babylon. "Touch nothing unclean."<sup>10</sup> Separate yourselves from the idols and the idolatry and the paganism of Babylon. Come out from there and go back to your homeland. Reestablish the pure worship of God.

And this is the posture of God's people today, is it not? We are to come out from the paganism and the idolatry of the world and form into covenant congregations and establish the pure worship of God. Here is a foreshadowing in the Old Testament of the work we are to carry out in the New Testament. And so the context of verse seven is this redemption, the captivity and redemption. And you can imagine that the people in captivity in Babylon needed the message, "Your God reigns."<sup>11</sup> They needed the message that God is in control. The Babylonians are not in control. The Assyrians were not in control. The Egyptians were not in control. God, your God—notice how personal this is—"Your God reigns."<sup>12</sup>

And this is the case today, friends. In all the troubles, in all the difficulties that encompass us in this world, the so called financial crisis, 401ks cut in half.... So be it. God is in control of these things. Our destiny, your destiny is not wrapped up in your retirement plan. Your destiny is wrapped up in Jesus Christ and in the fact that he is in absolute control of all things. He has numbered the very hairs of your head. Is this not the case?

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<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 52:8-12.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 52:11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

And as we look to the New Testament we find additional context, Romans chapter 10. Would you turn with me there? Paul quotes our text—Isaiah 52:7—in Romans chapter 10. And we get the same message in Romans 10. Begin with me at verse nine if you would. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”<sup>13</sup> There is the message, the New Testament counterpart of that Old Testament message, “Your God reigns.”<sup>14</sup> God is king. “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord,”<sup>15</sup> that he is the king, that he is above all, “and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”<sup>16</sup>

Verses 10 and 11 go on: “for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’”<sup>17</sup> Here Paul quotes from Isaiah chapter 28. He refers to believing in him, to believing in God, to believing in Jesus Christ. He applies the Old Testament text directly to Jesus Christ.

Verses 12-13. “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’”<sup>18</sup> Paul quotes Joel two verse 32. Again he applies the Old Testament text to Jesus Christ. “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD,”<sup>19</sup> that is, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then Paul asks these familiar questions.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”<sup>20</sup>

There is our text in Isaiah. And so from the perspective of the New Testament, from the perspective of the apostle Paul—as you turn back to Isaiah chapter 52 and verse seven—from the perspective of apostle Paul this text has to do with preaching Christ. This is how Paul utilizes it. And if the text has to do with preaching Christ, I submit to you, dear friends, pastors and elders, this text has to do with *you* preaching Christ. This is what the text is about.

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:9.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

<sup>15</sup> Romans 10:9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 10:10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 10:12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Romans 10:13.

<sup>20</sup> Romans 10:14-15.

And so, when you look at our text, “And says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns,’”<sup>21</sup> this is a text about Christ reigning. Again I say to you, this is how the apostle Paul puts it. And it is not just a text about Christ reigning. This is so because in order for Jesus Christ to achieve this reign in heaven, several things must take place. The one who has ascended, the apostle says, is the one who has also descended into the lower parts of the earth.<sup>22</sup> That is, Jesus Christ came down from heaven. He descended into this world. And Paul characterizes this world as “the lower parts.” We have the tendency to think of our world as the higher parts. Theologically this is certainly not the case. This is a fallen world, a world in need of redemption. And Jesus Christ descends into the lower parts of the earth. He comes into hostile enemy territory in order to redeem those who are his enemies. And that was you and that was me.

And as he came into this world what did he do? He lived an absolutely perfect, sinless life. I can hardly contemplate a 12 year old, let alone someone who is younger, living a sinless life. Knowing my own 12 year old days... Think back just a little. But he did. He lived an absolutely sinless life. And then as a sinless sacrifice for your sins and my sins, he went to that agonizing cross. He cried out, “My God, my God, why, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>23</sup> “Why is your intimate love abandoning me and I am experiencing your wrath?” But Jesus Christ knew full well why he was experiencing that wrath even as he utters this question. It was to take the punishment due to you for your sins and due to me for my sins.

And then to validate the fact that this perfect life and this sacrifice were adequate to cover the sins of his people, God raised him bodily from the grave. He was seen for 40 days by others. And the apostle Paul indicates that he was seen by more than 500 brothers at one time. And the apostle adds, “Some of them have died, but the rest of them are alive. You can talk to them if you desire, these eye witnesses.”<sup>24</sup>

And then, if that were not enough, at the end of that 40 day period, the disciples saw him bodily ascend into heaven. Two angels said to the disciples, “Why are you standing there gazing as you are?”<sup>25</sup> We would do the same thing; we would stand in awe. “He will return in just the same way that he has gone into heaven.”<sup>26</sup>

And so Jesus Christ ascended bodily into heaven and took his place at the right hand of God the Father as King of kings and Lord of lords. And the fact that he is king will one day be validated in his bodily return. At that time, the dead will be raised incorruptible and we will be with him in glory. He is the King of glory.

This is the message. This is the message. “Your God reigns.”<sup>27</sup> And this is the message, the good news as our text puts it. Look at it again. “How lovely on the mountains Are

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<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

<sup>22</sup> See Ephesians 4:9.

<sup>23</sup> See Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

<sup>24</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:6.

<sup>25</sup> See Acts 1:11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

the feet of him who brings good news.”<sup>28</sup> This is *the* good news. Christ reigns. It is the news of peace, of shalom, of peace with God through Jesus Christ, of peace of conscience through Jesus Christ.

And it is the news of good things and brings good news. The New American Standard Version puts it, “of happiness.”<sup>29</sup> But the word could be translated simply, “Good news of good.” And what is ultimately good? Or who is ultimately good? Do you remember the question Jesus asked a lawyer? The lawyer comes to Jesus and calls him, “Good teacher.” And Jesus asks, “Why do you call me good? There is no one good but God alone.”<sup>30</sup> And this is the definition of Good. Goodness has to do with God. And so the text speaks of good news of that which is good, the good news of God who reigns. And because this is good news, it is good news of peace. It is also good news of salvation.

I am so glad that Dr. Ferguson, the other evening, made a very poignant and pointed gospel appeal. What else is there, brothers and sisters? I heard someone say this was a bold move. I think not. I think this is a move that we ought to expect. This is a move that we ought to take. This is a move that always ought to be taken, the presentation of the good news of shalom, of peace and of happiness, of peace with God through Jesus Christ.

We all need to hear that news. And I think, unfortunately, too many individuals bring friends to church in hopes that their friends will hear the gospel. But they go away disappointed because their friends do not hear the gospel. They do not hear the gospel appeal. And so I appeal to you this morning, dear friends in Jesus Christ, be faithful to the gospel. Be pointed with the gospel. Preach the gospel.

We talk about preaching the gospel. We talk about preaching the good news. Do it. Lay it out there week after week so that people old and young hear the verities of Jesus Christ. So they hear the verities that your God reigns, that he saves, and that when he saves he saves completely. He brings peace with himself and he brings peace of heart.

And this is where your beauty as a church is found. Look again at our text. “How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news.”<sup>31</sup> Now, of course, Isaiah is not just talking about feet here. Most of our feet are not particularly lovely. But the word feet, you should realize, is a synecdoche, the part for the whole. It refers to the messenger. How beautiful is the messenger.

And why is the messenger beautiful and lovely? Because the messenger brings good news. When people hear the good news and they go out of the congregation, they may go out with a tear in their eye and they will say to you, “Thank you, thank you, pastor, for that news about Jesus Christ and his salvation which he has now brought to me.”

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See Mark 10:17-18; Luke 18:18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

In the past two years I have had the privilege of preaching in a PCA church in Pittsburgh which has been without a pastor. The pastor was defrocked because he was found to be committing plagiarism in his sermons week after week after week. The congregation was devastated. Then the pulpit committee led the congregation in calling a man. The man was very slow in responding to the call of the congregation. And he finally said, “No, I think I won’t come.” The people were once again devastated. And then the man called back and he said, “Would you reconsider?” Then the pulpit committee said, “We think we will.” And then the man delayed and delayed and delayed. Again he finally called the pulpit committee and said, “No. I think I will not come.” Hopes were again dashed.

Then, in the meantime, another church in the community lost its building by fire. That congregation was, of course, devastated. And when the elders and the pastor of that congregation were invited to join a third congregation, some of the people in the congregation that lost their church building by fire said, “Hold it. Wait a minute. We are not ready to do this. We want to rebuild our congregation.” But the session and the pastor said, “No, we are rushing on.” Many of these people were left heartbroken. Some of them came to the congregation where I was preaching. And so here was this congregation devastated by the loss of their pastor, devastated by a man who backed away from them on two occasions. In addition there were people in the congregation who lost their church building by fire and then lost their congregation.

In the midst of all this, I preached from Ezekiel. Do you remember the great vision at the beginning of Ezekiel, the cherubim and the firmament and the throne above the firmament? This is a vision, I think, of Jesus Christ coming to the people in exile. And the message was simple: Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is in control. Jesus Christ is above all and in control of all of these situations in which we are involved.

And I was amazed, truly amazed, as time progressed. I had people come to me and hug me and thank me and say, “You don’t realize how much encouragement and how much comfort these messages about the sovereignty of God and the kingship of Christ meant to us in our situation.” I was blown away. Perhaps I shouldn’t have been. But I was. I was blown away. And I was reminded of our text.

How lovely on the mountains  
Are the feet of him who brings good news,  
Who announces peace  
And brings good news of happiness,  
Who announces salvation,  
And says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”<sup>32</sup>

I say to you, men and women of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, your God reigns. There is nothing out of his control. Everything falls out in accordance with his plan and purpose. Every molecule in the universe is ordered for your benefit. And your beauty, your beauty as a church, is bound up in this message: Jesus Christ is King. “Your

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<sup>32</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

God reigns.”<sup>33</sup> Take encouragement, friends. Take encouragement and understand that this is the case. Your beauty as a church is bound up in this message, “Your God reigns.”<sup>34</sup> Take encouragement from God’s Word; your beauty is in the message that Christ is Lord. Be encouraged; your beauty is in the message that Christ is Lord.

Let’s pray together.

*Father, we bow before you as your servants. You are the King of all. We are little in the great scheme of things. But we are very grateful, Father, that in the big things and in the little things, in the minutia of our lives, you rule. And we thank you that if there is any beauty, any attractiveness, any reason why people should come to visit us as a church, to visit our congregations, it is not because of us. It is because of the message. It is because of the message that you are the king. And we pray together this morning that you would be pleased to keep us faithful to this message. We are confident, Father, that as we lift up Jesus Christ as the King, you will be pleased to draw men and women and young people to yourself. And so we thank you for the beauty of the gospel and for the beauty of the message that you reign as King. Hear us we ask and bless us we pray in the good name of Jesus Christ who is the only King. We pray in his name. Amen.*

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<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.