

“GOOD TIDINGS” FOR JERUSALEM

AND HER CHILDREN

Specially profitable is the chapter we have read from Isaiah 52, when we get a full view of all it contains. The first question is, who is the speaker? This question is answered by the phrase occurring several times in the chapter, and occurring many hundreds of times through the whole Bible,

“Thus saith the Lord God.”

This answer is either a great lie or a stupendous truth. It cannot be a lie when we consider who it is that utters it. Lies are uttered by liars. The prophets were not wicked men, but much the reverse. Paul says the world was unworthy of them. They wandered about in destitute and afflicted circumstances because of the unpopularity they incurred by their messages. When we look at these messages, they are a continual appeal to Israel to refrain from their evil ways and follow after righteousness. The idea that they were liars and impostors is preposterous and impossible. The books they wrote are resplendent with the beauty of righteousness and truth and holiness. There is no book on earth like the Bible in this respect. There is only the other alternative then, that the statement is true, that the Word of God came to them and that they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; so, as Paul words it,

“God spake to the fathers by the prophets.”

This is what Jesus continually recognises and asserts concerning the work of the prophets and their written word. He invariably recognises that word as the Word of God. To hold any other view is to break away from Christ, and to break away from Christ is an impossible thing for calm reason to do when his whole case is fully in view.

The first joyful thing, then, connected with this chapter is that it is a message from God. What sort of a message? There are different messages from God; some of them, yea, most of them, are very sombre, and some very terrible, portending calamity, and destruction, and woe. This is no such message, but the reverse; it is an inspiring, inspiriting, rousing message,

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem is an actual city upon earth; there is nothing in it to appeal to human interest at present; it is an insignificant and desolate city, but it has a history and it has a future. God formed a nation for Himself, and delivered it from Egypt; gave it a law; settled it in a country; did many things for it there, both good and evil; sent many messengers; and at last the greatest of all, His own son, whose advent upon the scene has left a trail of brightness even in the midst of the darkness that covers the earth. This work having been done, the question naturally arises, Is it to stop where it is, in desolation, in abortion, in failure? Is the hand of God no more to be seen upon earth? Is Israel finally thrown aside and forsaken? Will the earth never know more of Christ?

All these things are real, you perceive; they have nothing to do with metaphysics; they are not matters of human opinion or science; they are not related to any theory of the constitution of things in heaven and earth; they are simply matters of history and fact, as real and temporary in their way as the men and countries of European politics.

It is the answer to these questions that gives them the position of such commanding importance. God, who brought Israel out of Egypt, tells us abundantly in the prophets that their downfall and destruction is as much His work as their deliverance from Pharaoh.

“I have brought all this evil upon this people. Who gave Jacob to the spoil and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, neither were they obedient to His law.”

In the chapter before us, God, who brought the evil, proclaims its removal, and the bestowal of unbounded good, —

“Ye have sold yourselves for nought; ye shall be redeemed without money.”

Mark these words, and place the emphasis of lightning upon them, —

“Ye shall be redeemed.”

“I will take out of thine hand the cup of trembling, and will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee.”

“They that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord, and My name continually every day is blasphemed.”

“Shake thyself from the dust: arise and sit down, O Jerusalem. Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

“They shall know in that day that I am He that doth speak.” “Like as I have brought all this evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them” (Jer. 32:42).

No wonder the Spirit of God, in view of these things, bursts forth as it were into ecstatic adjuration—

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.”

We have all known experimentally some time or other, though but too rarely, the acceptability of the person who brings us good news. Even a very insignificant bearer of glad tidings is invested in our eyes with a kind of halo of importance and glory. If this is the case in small matters—for small indeed are the greatest individual matters—how natural that the bearer of these good tidings to Zion should be an object of ecstatic interest, —

“That bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth.”

For the time being it seems as if He did not reign, but as if the will of man alone was done, or could be done, upon the earth. When Christ was upon the scene, doing mighty signs and wonders, and speaking for God as man had never spoken, men were enabled to feel that God does reign, and not man. In the silence and passiveness of our present experience, mankind are otherwise impressed; but when the hand of God again is shown, especially in the terrible works He says He will perform, then men will say again, —

“Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.”

These works of judgment are accompanied with and followed by works of kindness to Zion. Zion’s watchmen, for ages put to shame, shall again *“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.”* David

calls upon the trees to clap their hands, and the seas to roar in prospect. It is natural, therefore, that Isaiah should be moved to exclaim—

“Break forth into joy, sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem.”

They are not called upon to break forth into joy without adequate cause. Men do not break forth into joy without a joy-inspiring reason. The reason in this case is plainly stated—

“The Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem.”

In what way is the comfort demonstrated? Is it by a passive distillation of Methodist “feeling” as it were, by which all Jews inexplicably find themselves happy on some particular morning? By no means; it is by no process of mere mesmerism that God does His joyful work.

“The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nation, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

The things done are affairs of open public feasibility and notoriety, as said in another chapter—

“Behold the Lord God will come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.”

The practical form of this promise is illustrated for us in the apostolic exhibition of Christ. Christ is the form of the power and glory of God; it is a personage who has been here and has gone away, and is coming back. As he says,

“Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.”

The matters in the chapter before us stand related to this event. When he arrives a busy work sets in, a work of reorganising divine things, which have fallen waste, chaotic, and dark. The people of the Lord are summoned to leave the countries in which they now dwell:

“Depart ye, depart ye, come out from thence; touch no unclean thing.”

Three points, —

“Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight;”

That is, there will be no need for fear or precipitation, nor for the impetuositities that belong to uncertain human movements; for God will be before and behind His people in that day now near, and the work will be the work of deliberation therefore:

“The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward.”

The form of his cooperation takes a personal shape, —

“Behold, My servant shall deal prudently: he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.”

And then the Spirit of God steps back, as it were, to contemplate the personage thus introduced, in reference to a special, striking, preliminary phase of his experience, which will have been a feature of the earth’s history before events arrive at this interesting conjuncture.

“Many were astonished at thee, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”

Look back upon the past 1,800 years. Whose figure has been most before the public as a marred and grief-stricken form? There is only one answer. Christ crucified has been a figure

in European history all the time, as a man of sorrows, known everywhere as a bleeding victim, as an impaled human sheep; none coming near him in the frequency and notoriety of this exhibition. It is this which will give his public manifestation as a conqueror and a deliverer of such unspeakable interest—

“He shall sprinkle many nations,” or, as the margin of the Revised Version has it, *“Startle many nations.”*

“Kings shall shut their mouths at him.”

The work which he proceeds to do is truly honourable and glorious; it is the work of Zion’s deliverance.

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

“For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest. The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be called desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah, for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.”

“I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies, and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine for the which thou hast laboured; but they that have gathered it shall eat it and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink in the courts of My holiness.”

“Behold the Lord hath proclaimed to the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, behold thy salvation cometh; behold his reward is with him and his work before him. And they shall call thee the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, and thou shalt be called Sought Out, a city not forsaken.”

These are great and precious promises. Those take a very poor and inadequate view of them who restrict them to a coming restitution of Jewish nationality, and who read in them a merely topographical restoration of the Holy Land. There is much more than this in it, as those are well aware who know the Gospel of the Kingdom. The children of Zion are mostly in the grave. Those who are her chief glory are there. What makes the history of Israel precious but the history of those faithful servants of God, such as Joseph, who managed Egypt with prudence for nearly a century, and Moses, faithful as never man was, in all divine affairs; David, the man after God’s own heart, and many others, of whose names we are ignorant? Has the Word of prophecy no light to shed on the question of their relation to this coming glory? We have the answer in this very book of the prophet Isaiah—

“Thy dead shall live.”

“He will swallow up death in victory,”

“Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake to everlasting life.”

We know how entirely this question is set at rest in the apostolic ministration. Christ proclaimed himself the resurrection and the life, and declared that at the last the dead would hear his voice, and would come forth; they that had done good to the resurrection of life everlasting, their corruptible putting on incorruption, their natural bodies becoming spiritual, their dishonourable bodies glorious, to die no more, equal to the angels. In view of these things, we can understand the meaning of Christ's words,

"Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God."

The promised restoration of Israel is therefore a far more glorious affair than the common run of so-called believers in prophecy have any idea of, which is the establishment of a kingdom in the earth, with an immortal body of princes surrounding the Prince of life and glory, whose power will be administered through them in all the earth, for the accomplishment of the promised blessing. This is the Kingdom, brethren and sisters, to which we are called. Well may we be patient and resigned to the adversities at present incident to the house of God. God Himself asks us to be comforted in the very prophecy we have been considering in the previous chapter.

"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 that shall be made as grass?"

Christ himself asks us to lift up our heads in view of the approaching redemption. Greater reason could not be placed before us.

"The redeemed of the Lord shall return with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

If we are in sorrow for the time being, the fact is recognised and allowed for. The "children of promise," waiting in the time of Zion's desolation, are thus addressed:

"The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath have I hid My face from thee, for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."

Taken from: - "Seasons of Comfort" Vol. 2 Pages 578-582

By Bro. Robert Roberts