



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 73

Marching from Babylon to Zion (52:3-12)

• God's people need to be holy

Salvation achieves mighty things from small beginnings. God's people need have no fears. But they must wake up to spiritual reality and to the need of holiness in their lives.

📖1 see
Genesis
45:18-21

Now Isaiah emphasizes God's sovereign authority over their lives

Now the prophet emphasizes the sovereign authority of God over their lives, in judging them and saving them.

*³For this is what Yahweh says:
'You were sold at no cost,
and without money you will be redeemed.'*

• God's people were given a lesson in holiness

When they were sent into Babylonian exile (or its spiritual equivalent) they did not have to pay anything. It was a sovereign act of God. They were given a lesson in holiness – for nothing! It did not come about by any choice of theirs. God simply decided it was time for his people to be forced to learn a lesson. But now the same is true for their redemption. Salvation is coming. It is also 'at no cost . . . without money'. Freely they received chastening! Freely they will receive restoration.

• Redemption is also freely given

They had faced trouble for many years. First they decided to go to Egypt 🏠 but eventually fell into slavery. Then the Assyrians oppressed them in Isaiah's time. Now Isaiah knows they will be in Babylonian exile.

• Many years of trouble, but...

Now a great change is coming – salvation is drawing near

*⁴For this is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them.
⁵Now then what do I have here?' – it is an oracle of Yahweh.
'For my people have been taken away for nothing, and their rulers howl in distress' – it is an oracle of Yahweh.
'And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.'*

But now a great change is coming. Salvation is drawing near.

1. Their salvation will be a revelation of God's name

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*⁶'Therefore my people will know my name;
therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it.
Yes, behold, it is I!'*

They will learn to appreciate God's foreknowledge and determination to bless his people.

2. They will learn the beauty of salvation

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*⁷How 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 to Zion,
'Your God reigns!'*

• A message of peace and rescue, and God's kingship

Isaiah pictures a runner running over the hills with a message of good news. It is a message of peace, of rescue, of God's gracious and merciful kingship in their lives.

• The people know a good message is coming

In verse 8 there is a slightly different picture. We are to imagine people on the walls of a city, watching for a runner with the latest news of what is happening. Then they see the news-bearer coming. It is obvious that he has good news. He is leaping and dancing as he runs towards them. The people know a good message is coming. They begin to shout for joy.

*⁸Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout aloud.*

*When Yahweh returns to Zion,
they will see it with clear eyes.*

*⁹Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for Yahweh has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*

*¹⁰Yahweh 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.*

• The joyful news is that God is returning to His people – immediate blessings

The good news over which watching people rejoice is the news that God is returning to them! It will not be something doubtful or dubious. It will be obvious. They will see it with clear eyes! If they will start looking forward to what God is about to do they will enjoy its blessings immediately. They may rejoice with music and song. The ruined state of Jerusalem is going to change. Redemption by the blood of the lamb is coming to them. God's mighty power – his bare arm! – is about to set to work. Everyone will see. Israel's salvation will not be something small and private. The whole world will see that God is doing something good.

Isaiah asks the people to respond immediately

So Isaiah asks the people to respond immediately. We must remember in all that Isaiah says that the exile in Babylon is only a picture of what is happening to the people of God. Although they were indeed quite literally in Babylon, yet their exile is only a visible picture of what was happening to them spiritually. Similarly Cyrus was only a shadow of a greater coming Saviour. Even now, Isaiah, writing in the eighth century BC, asks his readers to break free from Babylon and all that it stands for.

• Isaiah asks his readers to break free from Babylon and all that it stands for

¹¹Depart, depart, go out from there!

Touch no unclean thing!

*Go out from it. Be ready,
you who carry the vessels of Yahweh.*

*¹²For you will not go out in haste
or go in flight;
for Yahweh will go before you,
the God of Israel will be your rear guard.*

• The people of God are to leave Babylon – both literally and spiritually

• We are to be pure in spirit, but not fearful

But now (in Isaiah's time) and in the future, both literally and spiritually, the people of God are to leave Babylon! Priests had to keep themselves ceremonially clean, and the people of God are like priests. We handle holy things. We are to be pure in spirit. We need not be panicky or fearful. We must act immediately but not hurriedly. The one who trusts will never be agitated¹. God is ahead of us. God is behind us. We need not fear. No enemy can touch them.

God does not plan for us to be in exile forever – we march back to God's new Jerusalem

It is not God's will that we stay in exile for ever! There may come dark days in the Christian life when God chastises us and teaches us things that we never knew before. But they do not last for ever. We can sing a new song as we march from exile back to God's new Jerusalem.

1 28:16