

Isaiah Part 32: “Awake, awake...”

Isaiah 51 v 17 to 52 v 12

The LORD’s comfort for Zion (Isaiah 51 v 17 to 23)

“Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem” (v 17) – this ‘wake up call’ is directed right at Jerusalem. God’s people sometimes spiritually ‘fall asleep’ and need to be awakened, as Romans 13 v 11 to 12 declares:

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

“You who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath” – a common picture of judgment in the Old Testament is the ‘cup of God’s wrath’. God gives a cup ‘full’ of his wrath to those who are under judgment. Here, God calls Jerusalem (in times to come) to remember that they had drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury when they experienced God’s judgment through the Babylonians. The image is further strengthened: “who have drunk to the dregs, the bowl, the cup of staggering” – not only did the people of Jerusalem drink the cup, they drained it – drinking down to the dregs. They had experienced desolation and destruction, famine and sword, and this was God’s cup for them.

This powerful image was in the mind of Jesus when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion (Luke 22 v 41, 42):

And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”

What cup? The cup of God’s wrath and indignation against sin (Jeremiah 25 v 15; Psalm 75 v 8); the cup of salvation (Psalm 116 v 13). Three times (Matthew 26 v 42 to 44) Jesus begged the Father, if there was *any* other way for man to be saved, *anything* but the cross. This proves that there is *no* other way for a person to be saved except through Christ’s death on the cross, because if there was some other way, then his prayer was not answered and his death would have been in vain (Acts 4 v 12).

“Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more” (v 22) – God knows when to give the cup, and when to take it from his people. Now is the time for their redemption and for the shame of their enemies, so the LORD promises, “I will put it into the hand of your tormentors”. We should always be awake to God’s timing and loving promises...

The LORD’s coming salvation (Isaiah 52 v 1 to 12)

- Consider the hopelessness of Jerusalem’s condition, as described in Isaiah 51 v 17 to 20 and v 22. How and why does God promise to act on her behalf? See Isaiah 51 v 22, Isaiah 52 v 3 to 6. What must the people of Jerusalem do (Isaiah 52 v 1, 2)? What message does this have for the backsliding Christian? See 1 John 1 v 9.
- Imagine the joy of Zion described in Isaiah 52 v 7 to 12. How does Paul apply this passage in Romans 10 v 14, 15 and 2 Corinthians 6 v 16 to 18?

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“Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion” (v 1) – the first ‘awake, awake’ asked the LORD to put on strength (Isaiah 51 v 9); the second ‘wake yourself, wake yourself’ (Isaiah 51 v 17) asked Jerusalem to remember the LORD’s judgments and promises. Now, the third ‘awake, awake’ tells Zion to put on strength. “Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean” – Jerusalem could put on clothes of beauty, because the time of judgment was over, suggesting this prophecy has ultimate fulfillment in the last days.

“You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money” (v 3) – tragically, Jerusalem went after other gods like someone selling themselves for nothing. Yet they would be blessed by being redeemed without money. God’s mercy answered to their tragic sin! But ‘without money’ does not mean that it doesn’t cost anything: Isaiah 53 describes the great cost of redemption, but it is a cost paid by another.

“Their rulers wail,” declares the LORD, “and continually all the day my name is despised” – God sees how the nations have oppressed his people. Egypt held them in captivity (note that Pharaoh is referred to as “the Assyrian” (see Acts 7 v 17 to 19); the Babylonians took them away and ruled cruelly over them. Worse was their disrespect for God himself, whom they despised ‘continually every day’. “Therefore my people shall know my name” (v 6) – God will glorify himself first among his own people. It is as if God says, ‘I can tolerate my name being despised among the nations, but let it be known and praised among *my people*’ ...

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news” (v 7) – Isaiah prophesies about who bring the Gospel – the ‘good news’. They have beautiful feet for they are partnering with God for the salvation of men, and ‘feet’ speak of motion and progress, and those who are active in the work of preaching the Gospel. “Who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’ – this good news of peace, happiness and salvation can be summed up in the glorious proclamation, ‘Your God reigns’!

“The voice of your watchmen” (v 8) – the watchmen who see this happy return are probably those in Jerusalem who had long awaited the messengers. According to Ezekiel, the prophets were the leading ‘watchmen’ for the nation (see Ezekiel 3 v 16, 17).

“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations” (v 10) – the cry of Isaiah 51 v 9 (“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD”) is answered. God has shown the strength of his holy arm. No wonder the watchmen “sing for joy” (v 8)! “And all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” – the LORD does not make his saving strength known just for Zion: he also does this as a witness to other nations, so they too will see his salvation.

“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing” (v 11) – prophetically, this has both a near and a distant application: it was firstly for the Babylonian captives; but then for those gathered to the LORD in the end times. The call to separate from ‘Babylon’, both literally and spiritually, is a call to purity, particularly for those who “bear the vessels of the LORD” (see 2 Timothy 2 v 20, 21).

“For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you” (v 12) – when God’s salvation comes, both in its near and its ultimate fulfillment, there is a sense of peace and security, replacing ‘haste’ and ‘flight’, with the assurance that the LORD, the God of Israel will go before us and will be our rear guard.

Prayer – O Lord, your word says: “How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’.”

We give thanks for all those who preach the Gospel, both in Australia and overseas, who bring good news of salvation. Help us too to play our part in bringing your good news to a needy world, and to declare that ‘God reigns’. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.