

## Isaiah 52:1-12 – Awake!

One night – about half past ten at night – my parents were watching the telly, my dad had just come home from his shift on the railways, so they were relaxing in front of the box. Suddenly the door opens, and in walks my older brother David – he must have been about twelve at the time. He came in, saw they were watching the telly, and sat down on the settee (or sofa if you prefer) and started watching it with them.

My parents looked at him, then at each other, and then my mum asked ‘What are **you** doing down, David?’ To which he promptly replied ‘Watching telly’. ‘Don’t you think you should be in bed?’ she asked. ‘Just watch this...’ My parents could see that there was something a little funny happening here, so they let him sit there for five minutes or so. My dad then suggested that David should go up to bed as it was late. David shrugged his shoulders, said ‘Alright’ and went back to bed.

When David came down the next morning, my mam asked him what he did the night before. ‘What do you mean?’ he asked. ‘When you came down to watch telly with us...’ David looked a bit confused – he couldn’t remember anything about it – although his eyes had been open, he’d walked downstairs, and back up again, he’d actually spoken to my mam and dad, but he didn’t remember anything at all. He was asleep all the time. The advice seems to be that if someone is doing something in their sleep, you shouldn’t wake them up - apart from snoring, that is, then you give them a nudge (or worse!).

In this chapter, God is saying that he is not like that – he doesn’t want his people sleep-walking. God wants his people awake - He tells them through the prophet Isaiah to Awake! (I hope I won’t be having to say that at the end of my talk this morning!) God doesn’t want his people to stay where they are not fulfilling his purposes for them – it is as if they are wandering about asleep, at the moment where we join the story they are not doing what He wants them to do. He tells them to Awake! Wake up!

Although this is a passage written thousands of years ago, and was firstly a message to God’s people Israel in Old Testament times, I want to show you that the message was relevant then, it was relevant to the New Testament church, and it is very much still relevant to God’s people today. 2 Timothy 2:16 tells us that ‘All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,’ and this passage from God’s Word is no exception.

Firstly let's remember what the situation is here. If you were asked to name one of the prophets of the Old Testament, I guess Isaiah's name would be the first one you think of, more often than not. Like all prophets, God gave him a message which he proclaimed fearlessly, and at times what he had to say was very unpopular – the first 39 chapters contain pronouncements against God's people Israel for their neglect of God and for their sinful ways. But chapters 40 to 66 contain messages of consolation and hope, the promise of a wonderful future. What is written is a message for his people of that time – about 750 years before Jesus was born, but miraculously, much of what is written in this book also foretells the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour to bring salvation. So it is a wonderful book to read and study – I hope you agree.

As we join the story, Isaiah is speaking of God's people in captivity, oppressed by the Assyrians, an empire centring roughly on the area of Iraq today.

### **In this chapter 52, God gives His people some reminders.**

By calling them by different names, He **firstly reminds them of their real status** - of who they are, He reminds them of their inheritance. In verse 1, He says 'Awake, awake O **Zion**', in verse 2 he refers to them as '**Jerusalem, the holy city**'. He reminds them of their origins – Zion and Jerusalem, references to the holy city, the city where God was dwelling. This was the city of David, the great king of Israel, it was where Solomon built his temple, this was where the Ark of the Covenant was housed; it reminded the people of Israel of God's constant presence with them. God reminds them that they are **His** people, a **holy** people, a **chosen** people, not because they were any better than anyone else – they certainly weren't that – they failed their God so often, but because He chose them.

It's a bit like in olden days when people added things to their names to distinguish them from others – William of Orange, Francis of Assisi, Robin of Sherwood, Anne of Cleves for example. How wonderful to be able to add to your name 'of Zion, of the City of God, of the Kingdom of God'.

Joan of Zion, Brian of the City of God, Pam of the Kingdom of God.

God reminds the Israelites that they are a special people, chosen by God to be **His** people. This should give them courage, strength, a desire to do what their God asks of them, because He – Almighty God – is **their** God.

God reminds them here in verse 4 of chapter 52 ‘At first my people went down to Egypt to live’. Now this will of course have spoken lots of things to the minds of the Israelites – God rescued them from Egypt, he parted the sea in front of them so that they could walk through – amazing; he gave them manna from heaven to eat in the desert – wonderful provision; he gave them water gushing from a rock as they were thirsty – miraculous; God led them in battle against their enemies – victorious.

This was **their** God, all-powerful God. ‘Awake, awake O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendour, O Jerusalem, the holy city... Your God reigns.’ They are God’s own chosen people, truly blessed.

Just before you say, ‘OK. That’s all very well, but what’s it got to do with me? This happened nearly 3000 years ago, in a country thousands of miles away. The Israelites are not **my** people.’

Let me just remind you what Peter writes in his first letter, chapter 2, verses 9 and 10: ‘But **you** are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of **God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.’

This is speaking of the people of God in the New Testament, but it is not confined to those people of Israeli birth physically; this is speaking of a chosen people, a holy nation, same status, same position as in the Old Testament times, but these are people on whom **God has had mercy**. This now speaks of people of any race, country, on whom he has had mercy.

Who then **are** the people of God? In the passage we are looking at in Isaiah, we read in verse 9 ‘Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has **redeemed** Jerusalem.’ God reminds his people **secondly that they are a redeemed people** - Israel **knew** that they had been redeemed, they had been rescued and set free from captivity in Egypt.

Job, despite all his suffering and painful losses, could say ‘I know that my Redeemer lives’ (Job 19:25) – amazing considering what he went through. Israel was a redeemed people.

But who are the redeemed people of God **now**? Who **are** God’s chosen people? We already read in Peter’s letter that they are people on whom God has had mercy, people He has called out of darkness into his light. Earlier in that same letter – chapter 1:18- we read (Read 1 Peter 1:18-21).

Through Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, God’s chosen people have been redeemed. He paid the price for our sins on that cross – he took the punishment for our sins on that cross – he paid the price so that we could be free to walk with God. God **redeemed** his people through Jesus’ death on the cross. There was and is no other way to heaven, no other way back to relationship with God. God has **redeemed** his people.

It’s no coincidence that the section of God’s Word immediately after the passage we’re looking at in Isaiah tells of the suffering servant to come, the Messiah, we read the passage about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 in our communion service earlier this morning. This foretells the redemption of his people that would come in the form of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, 750 years later. How can anybody deny it? God has redeemed his people.

I would suggest that there are two types of people listening to this talk here or on the tape –

There are those who know that they are redeemed; you recognise that you have sinned by neglecting God’s ways in the past; you have asked for his forgiveness for wanting to go your own way; you are now trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus as the only way to restore your relationship with God; you are rejoicing because you know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

There are also those who don’t yet know whether you are a child of God, don’t know whether you have been chosen by God for salvation; you’re not sure whether God has a plan for your life.

**I believe that God has brought you here for a purpose. I believe God is drawing you to himself. I believe that God wants you to acknowledge that Jesus died for your sins on that cross.**

God wants you to be his child; he wants you to be free of whatever is holding you down – John 8:36 says, ‘If the Son (that is Jesus) sets you free, you will be free indeed.’ God has brought you here because he is calling you – do you feel that? Don’t delay, come to him, become a child of God, be free from your sin – Jesus has paid the price of your forgiveness, he has redeemed you. Come to him. Receive his new life.

There is no third type of person here – I believe God has a plan for **everyone** in this room, (pause) I believe that God is speaking to everyone here this morning – will you accept it today? Don’t leave it, speak to someone about it.

(Pause) Let’s return to our passage in Isaiah Chapter 52. God has reminded his people of their **real status**, that they **are** his people; he has reminded them that they are a **redeemed** people.

Let’s move on to see **thirdly what the people of God’s response, even their responsibility is.**

(Re-read Isaiah 52:1-3).

God is calling his people to awake, to clothe themselves with strength (verse 1), but not with their own strength – they are to go in the strength of God. They can go out confidently, if they trust in the strength of God. Where they had failed in the past was when they went into battle or into tough situations in their own strength, and not in God’s strength.

The reason they had to wander in the desert for forty years after being brought out of Egypt, not entering the Promised Land, was because they did not **believe** that God would give them the strength to overcome the people who lived there. They were afraid to go into the Promised Land. They didn’t believe that God would fight for them and give them the land.

This is God’s chosen people, they **can** go out in his strength and know his victory – who can stand against them, if God is for them?

In the letter to the Romans, chapter 8 we read those wonderful words (verse 31) ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ God has promised to be with his people in strength, in **every** situation – this is good news in today’s world, where there is so much evil going on around us.

God is for us, who **can** be against us? We can, in fact we **should** go in God’s strength to face the world.



The second half of verse 12 here says ‘.. for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.’ We’re told here that God will go before his people to prepare the way but he will also go behind them to protect them. How can they fail? God’s people, equipped with God’s strength, their God goes before them and behind them. They are a powerful force indeed.

Verse 3: ‘Shake off your dust, rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck.’ This is talking about the oppression the Israelites had been experiencing in recent years. Now was the time for them to rise up and take their true position as God’s holy nation, putting on their garments of splendour for they are God’s chosen people, representing him in the world. What a privileged position.

But how does this apply to us today? In Romans 13:11 we read the following: ‘And do this (referring to the command to “Love your neighbour as yourself”) And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.’ Isn’t Paul saying here exactly the same as God said through Isaiah? God’s people, God’s church needs to **wake up** from its slumber and put on the armour of light – God provides the armour, the strength; his people have to put it on and live for **him**.

**Now** is the time for God’s people to awake. I don’t mean that all God’s people should be out on the streets every minute of every day. Each one of us has to find out from God what **he** wants us to do. He has prepared a work for each of his children to perform. That may be to go out proclaiming God’s Word, but probably more often it is to speak a word to those we meet day by day, and all of us can pray – prayer is in itself a wonderful ministry.

Ephesians 2:10 says ‘We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.’ All who are called by the King are called to help him accomplish his goals in the world. The King of kings and Lord of lords has something he wants each of us to do for him – can you think of any greater privilege and honour?

There are some wonderful descriptions in Scripture of what God's people should be like – Zechariah writes God's people 'sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.' (Zech.9:16) Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians of 'a crooked and depraved generation, in which you (the children of God) shine like stars in the universe.' (Phil.2:15) Could this describe us? Is the sparkle visible? Where are the stars?

Why do you think the world is in the mess it is in at the moment? Could it possibly be at least partly explained by the church's failure to take this message to heart and act on it? I would suggest it **can** be put down in no little part to the weakness of the church in recent days. God's people are not shining as they should, they aren't sparkling.

The church is like a car – it has an engine, it has four wheels, it has plenty of petrol in the tank – but too often we're happy enough to sit there and listen to the radio! The ignition key has to be turned for the power to be transformed into movement. Even if the key **has** been turned, the car is not going anywhere until the brake is released! So many Christians think they're doing OK, although they haven't turned the key or they haven't released the brake!

The world **needs** God's church to be awake. This country **needs** God's people to live as God's own, chosen, redeemed empowered people. This city of ours which is full of evil **needs** Christians to proclaim their message loud and clear in the power of God.

In verse 5 of Isaiah 52 it says, "...my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock," declares the Lord. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed." Isn't this our world today? Isn't the world mocking God and his church? Isn't God's name being blasphemed every day? What a dreadful situation – God's church being silenced? Where **is** the people of God? Why are so many things happening in this once pleasant land of ours which are **contrary** to Christian teaching? Is it because the voice of the church is not heard? Shame on the church.

Oh how the world needs a church which is awake, alive, active. How the world needs to hear and receive God's message of redemption.

Verse 7. (Read)

The news that is being brought to Jerusalem is wonderful news; the messengers are bringing news of peace, of salvation; their feet are described as beautiful, because the **news they bring** is beautiful; news that the God of Israel reigns. When the good news is brought there are shouts of joy (verse 8) and the people of God burst into songs of joy together (verse 9). The people of Israel heard wonderful news – that their God reigns – they rejoiced, because they knew redemption and salvation.

Isn't this what our world needs to hear so desperately right now? God's people need to proclaim this **wonderful** news – Our God reigns! We have seen his redemption, we have received his salvation through Jesus. Almighty Creator God is **our** God; in his grace and mercy he has paid the price of our forgiveness in Jesus' death on the cross, so that we are a **redeemed** people; how do we **respond**? We fulfil our responsibility to proclaim the wonderful news of God, we proclaim his salvation, we proclaim 'Our God reigns'. In our passage we read that the watchmen shout for joy when they see their king returning – **we** are the present day watchmen; Jesus our King will return again; we should be proclaiming His salvation, and rejoicing because we know that he is coming again.

Let's pray that we will recognise that we as God's people are a truly privileged and blessed people. Let's be amazed by but also rejoice in our wonderful redemption through Jesus, and let's respond by proclaiming that our God reigns.