

Good News is Good News

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[0 : 0 0] But in our evening services at the moment we are going through a short series called Doctrine for Mission. The idea of this series is to think through some of the key theological truths that undergird the mission that God has given us all to share the Gospel with the people around us. We all know how important that is. Jesus has given that command to go and make disciples of all nations. We all know that that is what the people out there need more than anything else. And yet we all know that sharing our faith is hard. It's not something that any of us finds easy. And in order to help us do that more I want us to spend these Sunday evenings for a few weeks thinking through some foundational truths that I hope will encourage and empower us all in terms of our witness and our evangelism.

We started off by saying that God is God, an amazing reminder that he is able to do anything and that should give us so much confidence. Nothing is too hard for him. Is filling this church with people too hard for God? No, because God is God. Last week we thought about the fact that the truth is the truth. Recognising that the message that we have in Jesus is the truth that deep down everyone longs for and that deep down everyone needs. Tonight we are going to turn to Isaiah chapter 52 and verse 7 and our title for this evening is that the good news is good news. 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. News is a massive part of all of our lives.

Today we are bombarded with a constant stream of news. I'm sure most of us here can remember that not that long ago you could only get news at certain times of the day. So you'd have to go and buy your newspaper, you'd have to tune in to the tele-iWF in the morning, maybe at lunchtime, but most often it was in the evening, 9 o'clock news on the BBC, 10 o'clock news on ITV. You'd have to wait for certain times to get the news. It's not like that now. The advance of internet, digital TV, mobile technology means that we can get the news anytime we want. So before you get out of bed in the morning you can read your newspaper on an iPad. You can spend all day watching a 24 hour news channel if you want to. And no matter where you are, as long as you've got a signal, you can pull your phone out of your pocket and look at any amount of news you like, anytime you wish. Today we are bombarded with news. Except that's not quite accurate. The truth is, today we are bombarded with bad news. Tomorrow morning if you pick up your phone or open your computer or turn on a news channel, I'm almost certain. In fact I'm completely certain that the majority of the stories being reported will be bad news. Not all of them will be and there will be positive news each day and many of these stories are wonderful but they're always in the minority.

Our daily stream of news is predominantly negative. So we're told about inequality, racism, poverty, discrimination, neglect. We're told about injustice, local, national, global news of people being exploited and abused through the actions of others. We're told about illness, men, women, young, old, all struck down by disease, injury and depression. Isolation, people separated from loved ones, people left all alone. We're told about immorality. Every day the news feeds us examples of people saying, doing and experiencing awful things. We live in an age where we are constantly receiving bad news. In a world like that it is so refreshing, encouraging and pleasing to hear good news. Good news is so wonderful to hear. When exam results are good, when a couple that we know get engaged, when Scotland win it feels like a burst of energy runs right through you. Good news is wonderful to hear. But good news is also easy to tell. When a baby is born, when someone recovers from cancer, when Andy Murray wins

Wimbledon, we just can't wait to tell other people good news is easy to tell, isn't it? The best news ever is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So that means that it will feel like the easiest news of all to tell. Yes? No. It's not how it feels at all. Telling our friend the good news about our new job feels so easy. Telling our friend the good news about Jesus Christ feels so hard.

[6 : 42] So often it feels awkward, tense, strained and unpleasant. I remember reading a great description of this. There's a brilliant book about evangelism called Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World. It's by a woman called Rebecca Manley Pippert. It's a really helpful book.

And early on in this book she says something that's quite amusing. She's talking about this fact that she found evangelism very difficult. And she said, there was a part of me that secretly felt evangelism was something that you shouldn't do to your dog, let alone a friend. Trying to share our faith can so often leave us feeling as though we are the bearers of bad news. Why is that?

Why is the greatest news in history so hard to tell? Why doesn't it feel anywhere near as easy as telling news of babies or engagements or achievements? Why is it that if I announced tonight that we had been given a donation of £100,000 for our renovation, which sadly so far we haven't. But if we had, and I told you that we'd been given a donation of £100,000 for our renovation, why is it that we would be able to phone and text and tell a dozen people between now and bedtime without having to think twice about it? Yet telling one person we know about Jesus between now and bedtime feels impossible. Why is that? There's lots of reasons and there's no doubt that the devil is throwing far more opposition against the gospel than he is against the good news of babies and other day-to-day good news stories. But still, if the gospel is the best news ever, how can we avoid the feeling that our evangelism is a kind of unwanted intrusion into the lives of people around us? Well, I think the answer to that is actually very simple.

We need to remember that the good news is good news. Good news, that's what the word gospel means.

That's what Christianity is all about. So when you read the gospel of Matthew, you can just as easily call it the good news according to Matthew. It's the message of God's astonishing intervention into history to bring healing and hope to humanity. That means it's not boring, it's not depressing, it's not disappointing news, it's absolutely brilliant news. And in a world of constant bad news, the message of Jesus is so good. Now that good news runs right through the whole Bible, but a great example of what it's all about is here in Isaiah chapter 52 verse 7.

[10 : 04] Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus and he spoke powerfully to warn the people around him about God's judgment and he also gave the people many precious promises about God's salvation.

Here in chapter 52, Isaiah is looking ahead to a time of restoration and healing for God's people and in verse 7, he gives this amazing summary of what God's good news is all about. And I want us to look at this verse together and we see that Isaiah tells us four things about this good news and I just want to go through them very quickly together. First thing he mentions is peace.

This good news is a message of peace. That means that it's not a message of distress and that means that it's not a threat. There's already more than enough of these things in the world around us already. That was through in Isaiah's time. The nation he lived in was disjointed and pretty and almost disintegrating. There was shocking inequality and injustice in society and the surrounding nations loomed large over Israel. Today the circumstances are different but the same kind of problems are bound. People all around us face the trauma of broken relationships, maybe with colleagues, maybe with friends, maybe even with family. People are treated unfairly, left bruised and bitter by the behavior of others. People have pressure breathing down their neck, whether that's to achieve at school or to look good on social media or to stay healthy or to conform to the expectations of culture around us. Every day the people around us are attacked by external circumstances giving them reason to fear and by internal anxieties producing a constant stream of worry and stress. Life is full of pressure. Life is full of threats. The gospel is not adding to these. The gospel is a message of profound whole of life. Peace.

The gospel is also a message of happiness. Now the word happy is one of these words that can sometimes be helpful, sometimes unhelpful in terms of theology. It can easily seem a wee bit unrealistic as though we're trying to say that you know if you're a Christian and everything will always be just fine. It can also seem a wee bit shallow as though Christianity is just about being happy and if it is then there's probably easier ways that we can achieve that but neither of these is what Isaiah means. The original Hebrew that Isaiah wrote in literally says who brings glad tidings of good. Now good news of happiness is a brilliant translation of that because one of the key things been emphasized here is that this news is not negative. The news is brilliant. It's the kind of news that makes us shout for joy and not just kind of joy like oh I got an A in my exams.

Joy like the second world war is over. All of this is reminding us that the gospel is not a message of misery. It's not depressing. It's not intended to beat people down. It's a message telling us that something utterly amazing has happened. The gospel is a message of deep, genuine happiness.

[14 : 01] The third thing this verse tells us is that that that the gospel, the good news, is a message of salvation. That means that it's not a message of condemnation. Jesus makes that clear himself in John chapter 3 because the reality of condemnation is already here and the proof of it is in the bad news that we see every day but Jesus says I did not come into the world to condemn the world.

He instead came in order that the world might be saved through him. Now does that mean that we shouldn't talk to people about their sins? No, not at all. Talking about the gospel will always at some stage involve discussing the reality of sin. Even that word salvation tells us that there's a problem from which we need to be rescued. But when we talk about sin with people we must always be mindful about what we're trying to achieve and this is where it's so crucial to remember that the Bible's recognition of my sin, of your sin and of anyone in our community sin, the Bible's recognition of our sin is not a criticism. It's a diagnosis and the difference is crucial. A criticism is trying to harm you. A diagnosis is trying to heal you.

The message that we proclaim is not about a God who thinks the worst of the person that we're talking to. It's a message that tells our friend that in God's eyes they are worth saving, in God's eyes they are worth dying for. The gospel is not about thinking the worst of people because when you think the worst of people you will find any reason you can in order to give up on them. But when you think the best of people you will find any reason you can in order to never give up on them.

And the whole reason we have the gospel is because that's exactly how God thinks of us. That's how God thinks of you. And it's important to remember that the reality of whether or not somebody will accept their sinfulness is actually out of their hands. Whether someone accepts that or not is actually out of their hands and we're reminded of that in the Westminster short of Catechism. This is a great question, question 87, what is repentance unto life? And it's so helpful.

It says repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience. This is reminding us that both the sense of our sin and the apprehension of mercy are only ever by God's grace.

[17 : 30] And so as we share the gospel, as we talk about the reality of sin with people, as we talk about the reality of grace and salvation and mercy, all of that is completely dependent on God.

Our job is not to hammer people with the reality of how horrendous they are. Our job is to show people that in a world where so many horrendous things happen, God has come to save us.

The gospel message is a message of astonishing spectacular salvation. So it's a message of peace, it's a message of happiness, it's a message of salvation. Fourthly, it's a message of God's sovereignty. As Isaiah says, your God reigns. Now this is taking us to the very heart of what the gospel is about. The good news of the gospel is that God is sovereign. He has not forgotten us, he's not abandoned us, he has come. He's and he's come to conquer the kingdom of evil, he's come to destroy the power of death, he's come to rescue us from all the ways in which sin is holding us captive. He has come to put things right and he's calling us back to him.

And all of this is what the gospel is all about because when Jesus began preaching, what did he say? He came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God saying, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. That kingdom language is echoing exactly what Isaiah said, the fact that God reigns. The gospel is announcing that the king has come and that victory is his. So the fact that God reigns is at the heart of what the gospel is all about but it also takes us to the heart of why the gospel is such good news. The gospel is telling us that God is king and that's crucial because so much of the bad news that we receive comes from bad leadership and from terrible misuse of power. So you look at the bad news that you're going to see tomorrow morning on the BBC news website or in the newspaper or whatever it may be, so much of the pain and suffering that you will read about can be traced back to bad leadership and to abuse of power. That might be nationally where whole nations are an amess because of a corrupt government.

That might be domestically where people live in tragic fear of violence and abuse from those closest to them or it might even be personally where our own thoughts and decisions can torment us and lead us to a path of crippling anguish. All around us there's power and leadership that causes so much bad news. The gospel is telling us that God is calling us away from all of that.

[21 : 04] That's what makes the gospel such good news. So he's calling us away from a world of inequality. So if you look at the news just now it's absolutely saturated with examples of awful inequality and discrimination. A lot of the focus just now is in terms of racism but there's lots of other ways in which that inequality manifests itself. God is calling us into a kingdom where everyone is equal as a precious child of God. God is calling us away from injustice, from a world full of exploitation and greed and selfishness. He's calling us into a community where the two most important commandments are what? To love God and to love one another. He's calling us away from a world that is ill and dying and he's promising to bring us into a new creation where he's going to wipe away every tear from our eyes where death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain. He's calling us away from isolation into a beautiful family that stretches across all the nations of the world and that will never be broken apart again and he's calling us away from immorality and instead he's leading us on a path of holiness, restoring us back to everything that we were created to be by him in the first place. In other words in the Gospel

God the king is undoing everything that makes life rubbish. And that's why Christianity is such brilliant news and if anybody is not a Christian yet either here or watching at home make no mistake that's what you're rejecting. You're not rejecting some nice way of life, you're not rejecting some social club called the church, you are rejecting God's offer to put right everything that's wrong. That's what you're rejecting. God has come to put things right and the reason he can do that is because he reigns.

He's king. The Gospel is a message of his supreme all conquering sovereignty.

So the Gospel is a message of peace, of happiness, of salvation, of God's sovereignty and it's a whole host of wonderful other things too. This is our message, this is what we want to share, it's not dull, it's not miserable, it's not depressing. We've got to remember that the good news is good news but we also need to remember that it's not just our message, in fact it's not really our message at all. The Gospel we want to share isn't our good news, the Gospel is God's good news.

In Romans 1 Paul introduces his letter with these words, Paul a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle set apart for the Gospel of God. Now whenever you see, whenever you're in the New Testament and you see a phrase something of something, you can see the little of there, whenever you see something of something there's a decision to be made in terms of how we're going to interpret that. There's two main options, the of something phrase that we have is either what we call an objective genitive or a subjective genitive, objective or subjective. Now objective means that the of, that little word of means something like directed towards or about or something like that. Subjective genitive means that the of means something more like coming from or belonging to, so we've got objective and we've got subjective.

[25 : 40] So for example if you take the phrase love of God that can mean two things can't it? It could mean somebody's love directed towards God. So the love of God which I show and which shapes everything that I do that's my love directed towards God, love of God, that's meaning something like directed towards or about that would be the objective genitive because God's the object of my love. But love of God can also mean God's love towards me, couldn't it? God's love extended towards me, love coming from him, love belonging to him, God is the subject showing the love, so it's a subjective genitive. So how do we know which one is correct each time? Well the answer always comes in the wider context whether it's the sentence or the passage says. So here when Paul talks about the gospel of God, which one is it?

Is it objective or subjective? Does it mean the gospel about God or does it mean the gospel that comes from God? Now of course both are true and it's not that one's true and one's false, they're both true but which one's referred to here? Well our instinct might be to think that it's the first one, that that is the objective genitive, that this is the gospel about God. But if we carry on to verse three you see Paul says I've been set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son who was descended from David. Now that's telling us that the object is actually his son, Jesus. The gospel is about Jesus and that therefore implies that the gospel of God in verse one is subjective. In other words the good news is God's good news. It belongs to him, it comes from him. Now why is all this boring chat about grammar so important? Well for two reasons. One is because it's telling us that the information God wants to share with you is good news. Now that might seem like the most obvious thing in the world that you've heard me say all day. That's something that is so obvious, it's something that's so easy to take for granted. Because think of God, think of God in all his majesty, glory and power. Think of the fact that he is miles beyond anything that we can ever take in and not only that we are absolutely minuscule in comparison. Tiny, insignificant and totally unworthy but incredibly this God who alone is God, he wants to communicate with you and with me and that communication is only possible because of what we call revelation, the fact that God reveals himself to us. He does that in general terms to the creation, he does that in special specific terms through the scriptures. When we compare ourselves to God it's an absolute miracle that he would want to bother communicating with us at all. But what's even more amazing is that the message he wants to reveal is a message full of goodness. That's right, the God before whom you are a tiny speck, he wants to talk to you and he wants to tell you incredibly good news. The Gospel is God's good news. That means that the Gospel is simultaneously a line of communication and a channel through which goodness is poured out. So I want you to imagine standing on your phone underneath a tropical waterfall. Now I know that that's a silly illustration,

I know that's a strange combination of activities but that's telling you exactly what the Gospel is all about. You're on the phone, that means you are hearing information, you're receiving communication and at the same time you are under a warm waterfall which means you are being showered with blessings. That is what God is wanting to do. That is why he's revealing himself, that's what the Gospel is all about. And so it's wonderful to recognise that it's God's good news, the fact that God wants to communicate with us. But the second reason why it's important to see that the Gospel is God's good news is because it's reminding us that you don't have to make the Gospel good. It's already good, it's God's message, it's God's plan, it's God's promises. You don't need to make the Gospel good, it already is. You just need to make sure that your transmission of it is accurate.

And that takes us to one final lesson from Isaiah 52.7. We've been saying that this verse gives us a summary of what the good news is all about. Later in the New Testament, in fact later in the legislative Romans, Paul refers to this very same verse when he speaks about how important it is to share the Gospel. Let me read these verses. Paul says, but everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they've not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they've never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news? Here Paul makes a direct link between Isaiah 52.7 and our mission to share the Gospel. So what Isaiah 52 says applies to us as we seek to evangelise. And the final lesson for us all to learn here is that when we share the good news of Jesus, we are doing something beautiful. Most of the time we don't feel like that.

[32 : 54] Most of the time we feel repulsive. But you're not. If you are sharing the good news of Jesus, you are doing an incredibly beautiful thing. Or as Isaiah says, you have beautiful feet.

But why feet? Well, there's two things that come to mind and these are the last two things I'm going to say. First of all, feet on a Persian walking across mountains in 730 BC are not going to be pretty.

They're going to be very dirty, probably scratched, possibly bleeding and definitely not looking like the come out of a foot span. But they're still beautiful. And they're beautiful because they're carrying a wonderful message. And that tells you that your efforts to share the Gospel don't need to be super polished models of perfect eloquence and persuasion. They don't need to be like that. In fact, they might even be a bit messy. But if you are telling people God's good news and if you are conveying that accurately, then you are doing something very, very beautiful.

And that's where it's so important to remember that you are not going to ruin someone's day if you share the Gospel with them. Bad news will ruin someone's day. When we hear bad news, it's like we've been hit in the stomach with a bus. The Gospel is not going to do that.

Now that doesn't mean that everybody's going to be ecstatic every time we speak about Jesus. I'm not saying that at all. What I am saying is that if you share the good news of Jesus with love, humility, joy and kindness, do you really think that you are going to wreck that person's day?

[35 : 08] The second thing that we learn from feet is that the image of feet speaks of movement, of action. It's reminding us that as we share the good news, our words are always accompanied by our actions.

That's why it's crucial that our presentation of the good news is never accompanied by bad conduct. Good news cannot be carried by bad behaviour. So we need to think about our tone.

Should good news come with exasperation or with enthusiasm? We should think about our gestures. Should good news come with a smile or a frown? We should think about our demeanour. Should good news come with harshness or with gentleness? We should think about our mindset. Should good news come with guilt or with joy? Now I'm not saying any of that to say that you need to put these things on and pretend to be something you're not. That's just hypocrisy. What I'm saying is that if these things aren't there, then you need to go back and reassess your understanding of the Gospel, because if your theology leaves you exasperated, scowling, harsh and guilty, then your theology is wrong.

Orthodox Reformed theology and effective, beautiful evangelism are grounded on the fact that the good news is good news. Tomorrow is going to be another day full of bad news. In the midst of all that, you have got something utterly brilliant to say. May God give us the courage and the wisdom we need to say it. And last of all, for anyone who's not yet a Christian or thinking about it or not sure, this is really what it comes down to because you know, I believe in a word that's full of absolutely rubbish news and you go on to the news headlines and you're going to see just all sorts of awful stuff happening. You see sin causing havoc in so many people's lives.

Ultimately life is coming down to a choice whether you want to just stay with all of that or whether you want to hear the good news of God, whether you want to hear God saying to you, follow me, I've got something so good for you, for your family, for your community.

[38 : 21] The good news is just really, really, really, really, really good news. By God's grace, may we be the communicators of that message this week. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you've given us a message of peace, good news of happiness, news of salvation. Thank you that you are the God who reigns.

Help us to hear this good news. Help us to understand this good news. Help us to proclaim this good news for your glory. Amen.