

## *How Beautiful the Feet that Bring Good News*

### **Romans 10:5-15**

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Today we are talking about good news. The Apostle Paul has quoted from the prophet Isaiah to tell us about the beautiful feet that bring good news. My guess is that are all people who welcome good news. Good news comes in a variety of forms and pronouncements. Some of my favorites...

- School's out
- Supper's ready
- It's free
- We won
- You made the team
- You passed the test
- Do over
- Olly, olly, oxen free
- I now pronounce you...
- It's a girl...it's a boy...
- We're home
- I love you

Did you know the word gospel actually means good news? The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible relates gospel to good tidings or glad tidings, and it is associated with preaching or telling or publishing this good news. As the word developed in the Old Testament it came to designate "the messenger of God who announces the arrival of divine blessings."<sup>1</sup> Can you imagine what the word gospel meant to the people who encountered Jesus, the embodiment of God's good news? So it breaks my heart to hear a story like the one I read in a book. It was about a prostitute, a woman who not only sold her own body, but was even selling her daughter's body to support her drug habit. It was a terrible story of brokenness, bondage, heartache, failure, and sin. The author said a friend asked this broken woman if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. The friend said he would never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. "Church!" she cried.

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<sup>1</sup> Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible volume E-J, 442ff.

“Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”<sup>2</sup>

Friends, we have really missed the mark if people say about the church, “Why would I go there, I already feel terrible about myself. They would just make me feel worse.” We have missed the mark because the gospel is good news, and it is such good news that it overcomes the terrible feelings and situations in life and brings hope and meaning and comfort and joy and a sense of purpose and belonging. I understand the person who said, “Why would I go to church.” But I believe there is another image of church. Interestingly enough, it is captured in a story told by the same author who told about the person who asked, “Why would I go to church?” The other story goes like this: “Hemingway is said to have told about a Spanish father who decided to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid. The father, longing for reconciliation, took out an ad in the largest newspaper. The ad read, PACO. MEET ME. HOTEL MONTANA. NOON TUESDAY. ALL IS FORGIVEN. PAPA. Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father went to the square he found eight hundred young men named Paco waiting for their father.”<sup>3</sup>

In some ways the good news is like a person who calls out those words from our childhood games. Olly olly oxen free. That phrase, used in games like hide and seek or kick the can indicates that players who are hiding can come out into the open without losing...that everyone who is out or has been eliminated can come back, can come back and be free, can come back without penalty. Now both of those stories, the person who said why would I ever go to church and the dad who called out to Paco, “All is forgiven,” are both found in a book written by Philip Yancey, with the title, *What’s so Amazing About Grace?* By the end of that book it is obvious what is so amazing about grace, including the fact that grace is a free gift from God, that grace is God’s call for olly, olly, oxen free. Come back, come home, without penalty, without cost, just come. It’s a free gift. “By grace we have been saved.” And when you understand grace you understand just how amazing it is. You understand grace is good news. Oh, people of God, let us never forget the gospel is good news. The gospel is God telling us the good news in so many marvelous ways.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* 11.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, 37, 38.

The gospel is God telling us supper's ready. "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:1,2) Our God invites us to his banqueting table where there is food and drink, and it is not leftovers or warmed over, it is the richest fare. But how can we afford to eat at this table? Didn't you listen? It doesn't cost a thing. It is a free gift, an open invitation. That is what good news is all about.

The gospel is God telling us, "I care for you." That is what God said to his people Israel, his children. But he didn't say it when they were in their Sunday best, at an awards ceremony, when they were receiving a diploma or sitting on a comfortable couch in front of a warm fire. God said those words when Israel was living in humiliation as slaves, when they were in bondage, when their life was miserable and their self-worth was crushed and they were beaten down and broken. The good news of the gospel is God coming to us in our lowest point, our deepest time of despair, when we have given up all hope, and God entering into our world, coming alongside us, pitching his tent with us, and saying, "I care about you. I am concerned about you. I am here to help you." That is what good news is all about.

The gospel is telling us words of comfort. The story of Israel is not only the story of Exodus, of being set free from slavery and delivered from bondage. The story of Israel is the darkness and despair of living in exile, of being taken from your home, of being in a distant land and living as a stranger, alone and isolated. Into the despair of exile God speaks to his children and says, "Comfort, comfort." God speaks tenderly that the years of being alone, of being separated, of being a stranger, of being cut off, will come to an end. God will bring his children home. Comfort. That is what good news is all about.

I hope it doesn't sound redundant, but good news is good. Good news includes the creation story where God calls this world into being, where God speaks into the chaos and brings order and harmony, where God speaks and a beautiful world springs into being. Good news is the news that when God surveyed the wonders of creation, the sun and moon and stars, the mountains and seas, the fish and birds and livestock, the flowers and trees, the water and wind, God saw all that he made and said, "It is good." Indeed, it is very good. At the heart of the good news is that human beings, men and women, all human beings, all men and women and boys and girls, are created in the image of God. That is what good news is all about.

And when God redeems his people, when sets his people free from slavery, when God brings his people home from exile, this good God and this good world are exemplified by a basic command of love, to love your neighbor as yourself. This is a love for the weak, the vulnerable, for the widows and orphans, the women and children, the outcasts and excluded, the strangers and aliens, the least, the last, and the lost. This is a love marked by justice and equity and kindness and fairness, a love that is concerned that all people have enough to live on, to survive, and even to thrive. There is a phrase used by the prophets, those holy ones who had such a passionate concern for God's justice. It is a phrase that anticipates every person having a place at the table and their basic needs met. It is a phrase found in the prophet Micah, "Every person will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree." Such a simple phrase, but it is prophetic, for it anticipates a day when no one will hunger, no one will thirst, no one will be without a home. That is what good news is all about.

I mention these images from the Old Testament because God's whole history with his people has been one of good news. The passage in Romans 10 about beautiful feet that bring good news is taken from the passage in the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, where we find the promise of good news, "How 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.'" (Isaiah 52:7) But the fact that the words of the prophet Isaiah from the Old Testament are found in a letter written by Paul in the New Testament signals good news has taken a shape and form we could have never imagined.

- Good news is God saying, “A child will be born and you are to call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
- Good news is when we call Jesus by the name Emmanuel, which means, “God is with us.”
- Good news is this child named Jesus who has grown into a man standing up in the synagogue in his home town, unrolling the words of the prophet Isaiah...hmmm, isn't that a powerful and provocative association...unrolling the words of the prophet Isaiah and reading, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18,19) And then he looked out on the crowd and said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled.” That is what good news is all about, and it is found in Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son.
- Good news is a leper, an outcast, an outsider, a person that everyone called unclean, pleading with Jesus, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” For everyone who has ever felt like an outcast, an outsider, unclean in one form or another, please listen to what Jesus says to that leper. “I am willing. Be clean.” And then he does something more than simply saying be clean. He reaches out and touches the leper, and with his touch what is unclean becomes clean. That is what good news is all about.
- Good news is Jesus saying to tax-collectors and sinners, “I have come to seek and to save the lost.”
- Good news is Jesus telling a story about a prodigal, one who has wandered far from home, and in that story Jesus says prodigals can come home, not as servants, not as slaves, not as sinners, but as beloved children, wrapped in the embrace of a loving father, and smothered in kisses of love and affection.
- I said those verses about beautiful feet that bring good news are found in Isaiah chapter 52. Now I want to say that there is good news found in the following chapter, Isaiah 53, that sets our God apart from any other God. In Isaiah 53 we find out that a central part of the good news is that a servant will come whose suffering will be redemptive, phrases that might mean nothing to us at first...he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...he was despised, and we esteemed him not...he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgression, he was crushed for our

iniquities...the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...words that might mean nothing to us except that this man named Jesus, the one who would save us from our sins, the one who is God with us, the one who came to bring good news and set captives free...this Jesus had beautiful feet. His beautiful feet walked up the hill known as Calvary...where he suffered and died. But his death was not in vain. His death was not in vain. By his wounds we have received healing. A mystery like that never exhausts itself, and so we bow down every day of our lives and say, "Such love is too marvelous for us." That is what good news is all about.

- And good news is a tomb that is empty. No one has any clue what has happened, except that dead body of Jesus that was placed in the tomb is gone. No one understands. Everyone is confused, even afraid. And then an angel speaks. An angel speaks words of good news. "He is not here. He is alive. He has risen from the dead." That is what good news is all about. God is more powerful than death or any enemy or force on this earth. Jesus Christ is alive. He is risen. He is risen indeed. And he bring resurrection life to all of his children. "He who believes in me, though he should die...yet he shall live."

There is a person somewhere asking, "Why would I ever go to church? I already feel terrible about myself. They would only make me feel worse." I hope that person will give the gospel a chance. I hope that person will hear the good news, of a God whose love is so deep and high and wide and long that it covers this whole world, wraps up this whole world, redeems this whole world, saves this whole world, and makes all things new in this whole wide world.

A group of us were in a youth choir. I was just 20 years old, my faith was new, I was excited and soaking up all the signs of God's love and grace. Our choir would sing songs about Jesus, and there would be some testimonies and some readings. At one point in our concert a friend stood up and shared a poem. It was brand new to me. I had never heard it. And I have never forgotten it. It is a poem filled with good news. It is the good news not of a God who rejects or judges or condemns. It is the good news of God who loves and embraces and makes all things new. I think of that poem often.

## **The Touch of the Master's Hand**

It was battered and scarred, And the auctioneer thought it  
hardly worth his while  
To waste his time on the old violin, but he held it up with a smile.

"What am I bid, good people", he cried, "Who starts the bidding for me?"  
"One dollar, one dollar, Do I hear two?"  
"Two dollars, who makes it three?" "Three dollars once, three dollars twice,  
going for three,"

But, No, From the room far back a gray bearded man  
Came forward and picked up the bow,  
Then wiping the dust from the old violin and tightening up the strings,  
He played a melody, pure and sweet as sweet as the angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer with a voice that was quiet and low,  
Said "What now am I bid for this old violin?" as he held it aloft with its' bow.

"One thousand, one thousand, Do I hear two?"  
"Two thousand, Who makes it three?"  
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice, Going and gone", said he.

The audience cheered, But some of them cried,  
"We just don't understand." "What changed its' worth?"  
Swift came the reply. "The Touch of the Masters Hand."

And many a man with life out of tune and battered and scarred with sin  
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd much like that old violin

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine, a game and he travels on.  
He is going once, he is going twice, he is going and almost gone.

But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd never can quite understand,  
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought  
By the Touch of the Masters' Hand.

*Myra Brooks Welch*