

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2012-2013

“YOUR GOD REIGNS”:
A PROLOGUE TO OUR NEW YEAR IN THE LORD
(ISAIAH 52:7-10)

I. The King Is the Life of His People

- A. In ancient societies, the king was the embodiment of the kingdom’s life.
1. John Weir Perry writes: “The king was mediator of the life force itself, giving fertility and virility; carrier of the power of authority, giving order and integrity; and bearer of the aggressive might of the executive function, giving chastisement to disorder and encouragement to obedience” (*Lord of the Four Quarters: The Mythology of Kingship*, p. 4).
 2. There is truth in this concept of kingship that is lost to us modern democrats.
—It sheds light on how the Lord relates to his people as their divine King.
- B. Israel was longing for both their human and divine king during the exile in Babylon.
- C. Here are several major turning points in Israel’s history leading up to exile.
1. The apostasy of King Solomon (1 Kgs 11)
 - a. When he was younger, Solomon was very wise.
 - b. In his older years, Solomon turns away from the Lord.
 - i. Solomon marries foreign wives who introduce pagan religions into the heart of God’s Kingdom.
 - ii. Solomon himself commits idolatry.
—“Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (11:5)
 - iii. Solomon built temples for the gods of his wives (11:7-8).
 2. The Lord punished Solomon by cutting Israel in two (1 Kgs 12).
 3. Eventually, the Lord judges his own people for generations of unrepentant sin—Northern Israel in 721 BC, Southern Israel in 586 BC.
 - a. What were the sins of the two Israels?
 - i. *Idolatry*—Israel embraced false religions.
 - ii. *Injustice*—Israel became an unjust society.
 - b. North Israel is conquered by Assyria in 722 BC.
 - c. South Israel is conquered by Babylon in 586 BC.
- D. But God will never entirely abandon his people.
- E. Through his prophet Isaiah, God promises Israel a good future.

—One day, God would return to his people and rule as their King once again.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to John Perry, how did ancient people view their kings? How does this insight help us to understand how Israel viewed the Lord? (2) What are some key turning points leading up to Israel's fall? (3) What hope does God hold out to his people?

II. Good News (Isaiah 52:7)

- A. Isaiah begins this first line of prophecy by speaking about beautiful feet.
 - 1. In those days, feet were not often beautiful—no shoes like what we have now.
 - 2. Isaiah uses the messenger's feet to tell us something about the messenger himself.
- B. The beauty of this messenger's feet lies in the message he brings.
 - 1. The messenger "brings good news."
 - 2. The messenger "publishes peace."
 - 3. The messenger brings "good news of happiness."
 - 4. The messenger publishes "salvation."
- C. First, the message is "good news."
—Think: What could be good news for a people about to lose their land?
- D. Second, the message is one of "peace."
 - 1. "Peace" here is the Hebrew word *shalom*.
 - 2. *Shalom* is wholeness, completeness; not just the absence of war.
- E. Third, the message is "good news of happiness."
—When God's people hear this good news, they are going to rejoice in spite of the dire circumstances they will soon face.
- F. Fourth, the message is about "salvation."
 - 1. The word for "salvation" here can also be translated as "victory."
 - 2. This would have resonated with Israel because Israel seems to be on the losing end at this time.
- G. Altogether, "good news," "peace," "happiness," and "salvation" are pretty much different ways of talking about the same reality that is coming.
- H. And yet, what could bring about this reality?
 - 1. How will salvation, and victory, and happiness, and health come to Israel?
 - 2. The answer comes to us at the end of verse 7—"Your God reigns."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Isaiah begin 52:7? (2) What are four phrases Isaiah uses to describe the quality of the messenger's message? (3) What could be good news for a people about to lose their land and going into exile? (4) What is the nature of "peace"? Is it merely the absence of war? (5) How else can "salvation" be understood? How would this have impacted Israel at the point of exile? (6) What is the coming reality that will give Israel salvation, happiness, and peace?

III. Why “Your God Reigns” Is Good News

- A. To appreciate why “Your God reigns” ought to be good news to Israel and to us, we would have to first understand where Israel is coming from.
- B. First, think about the world in which ancient Israel lived.
 - 1. Isaiah’s Israel lived at a time when kings were the life of their people.
 - 2. The divine king—the god of the kingdom—was seen as the real power behind the throne.
 - 3. We can see why “Your God reigns” is good news.
—It means that the earthly kingdom of Israel might be revived once again.
- C. Second, the strength of a nation’s deity was evidenced by the strength of the nation.
 - 1. When a kingdom is defeated by another, some would infer from that event that the god of the defeated kingdom has also been defeated.
 - 2. If Israel is defeated by Babylon, the Babylonians and other nations would have inferred that Israel’s God has also been defeated.
 - 3. We can see another reason why “Your God reigns” would be good news.
—It shows that Israel’s God, YHWH, is the one true God of the heavens and the earth.
- D. “Your God reigns” is good news for Israel for at least two reasons.
 - 1. It demonstrates that Israel’s God, the Lord YHWH, is stronger than the gods of the other nations.
 - 2. It implies that Israel’s own kingdom will come back to life.
—Israel’s future is dependent on YHWH God reigning as King.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) To appreciate what the message “Your God reigns” would have meant to Israel, what factors would we have to consider? (2) The message, “Your God reigns” is good news for Israel for at least two reasons. What are they?

IV. The Return of the Lord to Zion (Isaiah 52:8)

- A. The prophet elaborates on this good news about the reign of God (v 8).
 - 1. Verse 8 reads: “The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice...for eye to eye they see *the return of the LORD to Zion.*”
 - 2. This passage shows us that the watchmen of Israel will “lift up their voice” and “sing for joy” when they see the Lord returning to Zion.
- B. The assumption here is that when Israel goes into exile, there is a sense in which the Lord’s Presence departs from them.
- C. This idea is confirmed for us in the words of the prophet Ezekiel himself.
 - 1. In Ezekiel 10, the prophet records a vision where he sees the Lord’s glory gradually moving away from the temple and Jerusalem itself.

- a. The Lord's Glory-Presence moved from the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the Holy Place (11:4).
 - b. The Glory-Presence moves from the threshold of the holy place to the east gate of the temple (11:19)
 - c. The Glory-Lord Presence moves from the east gate of the temple, out of the city, and then to the mountains east of the city (11:23).
- D. In what sense did God depart from his people?
- 1. God did not...
 - a. withdraw his promises from Israel.
 - b. subtract his omnipresence.
 - 2. God withdrew his Presence in the sense that he withdrew his royal dignity, favor, and life-giving wholeness from Israel.
 - 3. Israel's exile was thus a state of shame and disempowerment for Israel.
 - Israel was in danger of being assimilated into Babylon; its light to the world almost snuffed out.
- E. And so, it is in this cultural situation that Isaiah's promise applies.
- 1. The message, "Your God reigns" comes in the context of YHWH's triumphant return to Zion.
 - 2. When the Lord returns, he will be enthroned amongst his people once again, and Israel will come back to life.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Israel's watchmen sing in joy at "the return of the LORD to Zion." In what sense did the Lord leave Zion/Israel in the first place? (2) How does Ezekiel 10 describe the departure of the Lord from his people? (3) In what context or on what occasion does the proclamation "Your God reigns" come?

V. Break Forth into Singing (Isaiah 52:9)

- A. The prophet goes on to talk about the celebrations around the Lord's return to Zion: "Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem..."
- B. The "waste places" are a reference to the land of Jerusalem after the exile.
 - But they are also a metaphor for the people of Jerusalem in exile.
- C. Why will the wasted people of Jerusalem break forth into song?
 - "for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do the wasted people of Jerusalem react when they see YHWH return to Zion? (2) Why will they break forth into song at the Lord's return?

VI. The Lord Bears His Holy Arm Before the Nations (Isaiah 52:10)

- A. When the Lord returns to comfort his people, all the nations will see the goodness and the power of the Lord God himself.
- B. At that time, there will be no question of the Lord's supremacy over all other gods.
- C. Consider how the Lord likens the way that he saves Israel: "The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations..."
- D. When the Lord shows forth his power like that, "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."
 - 1. This is a universal statement here.
 - 2. All the nations of the world shall see that YHWH is victorious.
- E. The Lord shows his power before the nations so that they will worship YHWH.
 - "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other!" (Isa 45:22)

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the Lord describe his show of power? (2) Who will see the salvation/victory of YHWH? (3) Why does the Lord show his power to the nations? (See Isaiah 45:22)

VII. Let Earth Receive Her King

- A. Judah spent seventy years in exile (Dan 9).
- B. When they return to the land, the hard work of rebuilding a nation begins.
- C. But things weren't quite the same.
 - 1. The throne of David was empty.
 - 2. There was no sign that the Lord had returned in glory.
 - 3. Instead, the land of Israel came under the control of new pagan powers.
 - The Persians (539 BC)
 - The Greeks (332 BC)
 - The Romans (63 BC).
- D. For the Jews, the exile was not yet entirely over.
- E. Sometime around 28-29 AD, John arrives on the scene, declaring that *the Kingdom of God is coming near*.
- F. To those who wondered if he was the long-awaited King who was to come, John replies: "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Lk 3:16).
- G. John was referring to Jesus (Lk 3:22).
- H. Matthew 4:23-25 describes Jesus' ministry this way:
 - "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed

them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”

- I. Jesus was doing what YHWH said he would do when he returns: Set the captives free, end the exile, etc.
- J. At the death of Jesus, God bears his holy arm, literally, and powerfully removes our sins once and for all.

God has returned to his people in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he wants us to receive Jesus as our rightful King, and to swear allegiance to him. What does it mean to receive Jesus as our divine King? It means resting on Jesus alone for salvation from sin and our enemies. It also means submitting ourselves to Jesus' rule and striving to obey his Word.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was the experience of the Jews upon return to their land? (2) What was the message of John the Baptist? (3) How does the Kingdom of God relate to Jesus? How do we know that God's Kingdom was drawing near through Jesus? (4) How are we to respond to Jesus?