

Prayer & Self Denial 2019 - 'Where God Leads'

1

Julian Doorey - Sermon - Week 4 - Responding to Mission - *it's all about the feet* - 30-6-19**How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of them who bring good news, peace & salvation**

(Isaiah 6:8, 51:17-20, 52:3-5, Psalm 137:1-6, Isaiah 52:1-2, 6-12, Rom 10:14-15, Eph 6:14-15)

Painting 'live': Mike South & Mike Hay. Mt Cook scene with person walking towards mountain. Start painting at 1st song. Show blank canvas to congregation at start, then turn to side to hide. Ask people not to use the side door during the service... use the other door.

Already seen <PSD 2019 - Vid - Theme 5 - NZ Reflect - We are Committed to Miss (NZ) - 2m 55s

Prayer**Introduction**

Welcome to the 4th and final week of our NZ Baptist Mission 'Prayer and Self Denial' (PSD). This is our annual one month focus on global physical and spiritual needs and our response to that. NZ Baptists have worked overseas since 1885. Currently we work in India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Macau and East Asia. The purpose of PSD is to raise awareness, prayer and funds for overseas mission. Our collective response will be today - after the sermon.

2

This year's theme is 'Where God Leads', taken from Isaiah 6:8: 'Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' Where is God leading you - as a person? Where is God leading us - as a church community?' Our previous 3 messages have been: (i) Empowered for mission - the work of the Holy Spirit, (ii) Called to mission - discerning God's path for our lives, (iii) Denying self for mission - taking up our cross, and today (iv) Responding to mission - it's all about the feet.

It's great to have the 2 Mikes (South & Hay) worshipping God through art - drawing and painting. Starting with a blank canvas, they're creating. We start our lives with a blank canvas. We can't choose our chromosomes (born with those), or change our chances (upbringing sets those), but we can make choices to create something beautiful on our life canvas. What choices are you making?

In today's PSD video, Pastor Arnie reflected on his journey around the 4 mission fields (previous videos) to see what NZ Baptists do. He challenged us: **What is the call God has placed upon your life? Is it to stay... or go? We're all on mission. Let's support each other in the work that God has called us to. Let's support our overseas team, as they pursue their call. Let's support our local churches as they minister to their local communities. As NZ Baptists we're committed to mission.**

Learning from Ancient Israel

3

Today we're reading from Isaiah 51 and 52, learning from the people of Israel around 600 BC (2600 years ago). Israel was a tiny group of people on a tiny speck of land in the Middle East. Israel came about through the deliverance (exodus) of a group of people out of slavery in Egypt. They were called to be God's people and God lead them into the promised land. They were called to live and worship in such a way, to show the surrounding peoples the one true God. Sometimes they did well - living righteously, with justice for all, but other times they failed miserably - forsaking God and living unjustly - and God noticed. At the same time there was the rising and falling of regional alliances, kingdoms, and empires around them. This included the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians (in that order). The OT records 39 significant battles in Israel. Jerusalem has been attacked 52 times, captured and recaptured 44 times, besieged 23 times, and

destroyed twice (includes modern history?). Israel was just a speck in the Ancient Near East, at the mercy of powerful military neighbours and at the mercy of God.

Jewish exile in Babylon - 586 BC

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Isaiah 51 and 52 is prophetic writing about the Jewish exile to Babylon (modern day Iraq) about 600 years before Jesus. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Jerusalem in 605 BC. In return for Jerusalem and Judah paying tribute / tax to Babylon, a certain peace was maintained. When they rebelled and refuse to pay the tax, the Babylonians attacked further. Eventually Babylonian armies besieged Jerusalem for over a year. Surrounding a city, preventing anybody or anything (food or water) to enter or leave is all about starving a city into surrender. Finally, the Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem, the Jewish temple and the royal palace in 586 BC. Over this time there were several deportations of Jews to Babylon, resulting in about 25% (approx 20,000 out of 80,000 people) forced to walk for 4 months. The remaining 75% stayed in Jerusalem and Judah surviving in pretty rough conditions. Isaiah tells of this judgement and exile.

5

Isaiah 51:17-20. Judgement and Exile

17 Awake, awake! Rise up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger. 18 Among all the children she bore there was none to guide her; among all the children she reared there was none to take her by the hand. 19 These double calamities have come upon you - who can comfort you? - ruin and destruction, famine and sword - who can console you? 20 Your children have fainted; they lie at every street corner, like antelope caught in a net. They are filled with the wrath of the Lord, with the rebuke of your God. (TNIV)

Isaiah 52:3-5

3 For this is what the Lord says: 'You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed.' 4 For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them. 5 And now (*Babylon*) what do I have here?' declares the Lord. 'For 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'. (TNIV)

6

PP - Jewish exile in Biblical context

7

PP - Babylonian empire & Jewish trek

Who was deported to Babylon?

8

We're told (2 Kings 24) that Nebuchadnezzar exiled the Judah king, his family, 'all the princes, all the mighty men of valour, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths'. The most prominent citizens - professionals, priests, craftsmen, and the wealthy were deported - including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The poor 'people of the land' remained. All temple and palace treasures were taken. The nation was split into two: Jews deported to Babylon and Jews remaining in Judah. We could call this a social, political and religious genocide - destroying a country - forcing key leaders of politics, business, industry, education, health etc into foreign exile.

What was life like for the exiles in Babylon?

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Exile for a long period of time (or forever) is punitive, not an overseas holiday - a bit like sending convicts from Britain to Australia in the 18th century. While the Babylonians could be very cruel in wars, their attitude toward the captive Jews seems to be 'live and let live'. No bloody persecutions occurred. The Jews faced powerful cultural pressures in a foreign land, as they sought to maintain their religious identity, practices and philosophies. Their lives were probably better than those that remained in Judah. The prophet Jeremiah told the exiles (Jer 29:5-8) to 'build houses and settle down, plant gardens and eat the produce, marry and have families, and seek the peace and prosperity of the city'. On the surface, life in Babylon was not too awful.

What was the impact on the exiles in Babylon?

Despite exiled Jews lives seeming not too harsh, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and their sacred temple, followed by forced deportation, left many exiles feeling broken, hopeless and abandoned by their God Yahweh. The exile was unexplainable: had not God promised he would be their God; they would be his people and they would live in the promised land? Hebrew history was built on the promise of Yahweh to protect them and use them for his purposes in human history. Had their faith in this promise been misplaced? The promised land and holy city lay in ruins... where was Israel's God? Psalm 137 expresses the feelings of the exiles:

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Psalm 137:1-6

1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' 4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. 6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. (TNIV)

Everything is gone - their land, their temple, God's presence, their national and religious identity. No wonder they wept. The Babylonian exile is actually presented in the Bible as a punishment (from God) for idolatry and disobedience to Yahweh. Israelite prophets began to see the regional (international) wars as part of God's judgement. The prophets frequently accused the people of insincere worshiped their one true God, and they had neglected or hurt the poor, specifically the orphans, widows and aliens (today's refugees). And so, they considered that God could have used King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians to punish them by taking them into exile. Babylonian exile represents one of Judaism's darkest hours... but God wasn't finished yet.

Exiles return to Jerusalem

After the Jews had been exiled for about 50 (70?) years, the Persian empire (modern day Iran) defeated Babylon. King Cyrus of Persia gave permission in 539 BC for the exiled Jews to return home. Over the next 5 years many of the exiles returned to Jerusalem (4 month trek) and rebuilt the city, the temple walls and the temple. A number of exiles or their descendants did not return, remaining in Babylon as part of Jewish Diaspora communities in the Middle East eg: Iraqi Jews.

During the exile, the prophets being aware of God's judgement upon them, had also begun speaking of a future salvation, when the Israelites would be gathered together once more in Jerusalem, their society and religion purified, and a kingdom re-established. Isaiah tells of the return.

11

Isaiah 52:1-2, 6-12. Exiles return to Jerusalem

1 Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendour, Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. 2 Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, Daughter Zion, now a captive. 6 (Therefore) 'My people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I'. 7 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!' 8 Listen! Your watchmen (in Jerusalem) lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion (Jerusalem), they will see it with their own eyes. 9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. 11 Depart, depart, go out from there (Babylon)! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the

Lord's house. 12 But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard. (TNIV)

And so, the prophets considered that God could use King Cyrus of Persia to bring salvation to the Jews by allowing them to leave their Babylonian exile and trek back to Jerusalem and Judah.

It's all about the feet

12

At the heart of this passage about the return, is the wonderful verse Isaiah 52:7 '[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 \(Jerusalem\), 'Your God reigns!'](#). Prophetically, this had both a near and a distant application. It was intended for the Babylonian captives, but also for those who follow Jesus. This verse predicts a messenger coming over the mountains to Jerusalem, declaring the good news that God's people will be freed from Babylon; declaring peace that God's people will come home soon, and declaring salvation that God's people will be saved from their enemies... leading to the victorious and celebratory 'Your God reigns'. Where God reigns - there is good news, there is peace, there is salvation / shalom / wellbeing.

Can you imagine the sense of joy for the exiles who had felt broken, hopeless and abandoned, with their national and religious identity in tatters - to be told you're going home? The watchmen in Jerusalem will shout with joy when they spot the messenger and returnees. The Jerusalem Jews will celebrate with song. Yahweh has saved his people. Paul in the New Testament echoes Isaiah 52:7 in his argument for sending people out in mission to share the good news...

Rom 10:14-15

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: '[How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!](#)'

And again in...

Eph 6:14-15

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Notice how... *it's all about the feet*. The feet of those who bring (or take) good news are called beautiful - partnering in God's mission. 'Feet' speak of activity, motion, and progress, and those who are active and moving... 'Continuing the work of Jesus in the world' (Cavy by-line). As we've heard other times, feet in a Middle Eastern / Asian culture traditionally are regarded as unclean (and they were very unclean), the lowest and least respectful part of the body. But it's the feet that bring (or take) the gospel.

Let's hear from our global mission workers Jo and Charlie Kennedy in K-Town, who this church is supporting. What does bringing good news, peace and salvation look like for them?

[Video - Jo & Charlie - Skype call - 21-6-19 - 2m 48s \(play loud\)](#)

Jo and Charlie talked about: doing everyday life with others, displaying Jesus through interactions, Sunday school with Jesus songs and crafts, being intentional in assisting others through teaching English and computer training (skills which most of us have), and looking to help the elderly.

All children return to auditorium to join families about 5 mins before the end.

Are we living in Babylon?

13

We've read about the Isaiah messenger, we've heard from global mission workers... what about us? It's been suggested by some that Western Christians (eg: NZ) are experiencing a type of Babylon. Previously, Christianity and the church were a much more central part of society. *Build it and they would come*. Now Christianity and the church are very much at the margins. Our faith and morals are either challenged or simply dismissed. Perhaps sometimes we feel like weeping, as we remember previous times, when God seemed to be really working. I think back to my conversion and charismatic days... but I must move forward. We have plenty of mountains in NZ... homelessness, youth suicide, increasing inequality, generational cycles of poor parenting and underachievement, March 15 shootings etc. We too, need to walk across these mountains... using our feet to bring good news, peace and salvation into hurting lives. Note the focus here is not about our attitude, our heart, our mind, our Bible knowledge, our prayer (all important), but getting off the couch and using our feet for God's work. *Then* we shall see beauty and experience blessing.

Invitation to respond - with your feet

I hope you've enjoyed and engaged with our NZ Baptist global mission focus 'Where God Leads', concluding today. We invite you to make a personal and collective response - to support our global mission workers to take good news, peace and salvation overseas. We invite you to use your feet and come to the front (invitation, not pressure, community, private). You'll see a collection of footwear on the table - shoes, boots, gumboots, sports etc. You'll also see a shoe box to receive offerings or pledges.

1. Either (i) Give your PSD offering, or (ii) Write a pledge of what you will give (via internet banking or cash) within 2 weeks. Include 'Self Denial' and your 'Cavy giving number' to receive the full tax credit at the end of the year. Pledge forms and pens are here on the side tables. Gather around the side tables, rather than single file to save time. Put your offerings or pledges into the shoe box on the central table.
2. Then take home the other bit of paper which has Isaiah 52:7 on it. '[How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of them who bring good news, peace and salvation. Our God reigns](#)'. Keep it in your pocket for several days as a reminder, that you also are a messenger.

This does not need to be a quiet response...

Ask people not to look at the painting when they come to the front.

MP3 - Our God Reigns (How lovely on the mountains are the feet) - 2m 59s (play quiet & loop)

Final song - congregation: The Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I am Lord)

Painting 'live': Mike South & Mike Hay. Mt Cook scene with person walking towards mountain. Reveal painting & interview painters about picture and today's theme.

Benediction and blessing

End