

Readings for Lent 5 – Isaiah chapter 51, verse 17 to chapter 52, verse 12:-

In these verses Israel is summoned to awake and return to the Lord's favour. The Lord God speaks to his people through the words of the prophet. These passages of Scripture can all be understood as referring to both the historic liberation of Jerusalem and the end of the exile under Cyrus and also to the future liberation of the Children of God in the establishment of the New Jerusalem. The universality of events in chapter 52, verses 1 and 10 for example have not yet taken place. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed by "*the uncircumcised and unclean*" Roman army in A.D.70. As believers we still wait and pray for the fulfilment of verse 10!

Verses 17 – 20:- In verse 18 we read that it is the lack of spiritual leadership which has led to the gross sins of the People of God. Worse still it was the fact that the "Elders of the House of Israel" were the leaders in the worship of idols – see Ezekiel chapter 8, verses 7 – 12 for example.

Jerusalem, the City of God, had turned away from him and put its trust in the worldly adoration of graven images which could neither answer or give aid. They faced the righteous punishment which led to them seemingly abandoned by the Lord God.

Verses 21 – 23:- The Lord declares that the period of captivity is punishment enough and will come to an end. Now it is the turn of the oppressors to drink the cup of the Lord's vengeance because of their excesses and gross use of force. The people of Jerusalem taken into slavery were literally 'walked over'. They were exploited for the good of their captors who now face the judgement of the Lord God.

Chapter 52, verses 1 – 6:- The Lord God calls on Jerusalem again to awake up and rejoice in the new beginning. The people had sold themselves into bondage for nothing of any value – only the empty promises of the world. As we see in Isaiah 44, verses 9 – 20, an idol made with man's hands' is just another block of wood or stone. It can do nothing to rescue him or help in any way. The Lord promises to reveal his name to them. This means that they will come to understand the very depths of his being. The 'Name of the Lord' is the totality of his personality and characteristics see Exodus chapter 34, verses 5 – 7. When we call on the name of the Lord we are invoking the totality of these characteristics.

Verses 7 – 10:- Note that the words "*good tidings*" can be translated "Gospel". The 'Good News' of joy and consolation is brought to the People of God by these messengers. Their very feet are "*beautiful*" because they bear tidings of the most wonderful thing in the universe – the redeeming love of God. These messengers were a type (a forerunner and pattern) of the Gospel missionaries of the New Testament age. The quote is used by Paul in the Letter to the Romans chapter 10, verse 15. Unfortunately then, as now, there was a reluctance to hear and act on the message given!

Verses 11 – 12:- Here is a call to leave behind the worthless things of the world, to purify themselves and to move calmly and quietly on the road prepared for them (chapter 40, verses 3 – 5). As at the time of the Exodus, the Lord God would go before them and when necessary would stand behind them to guard and protect. This happened as the Egyptian army approached before the crossing of the Red Sea – Exodus chapter 14, verses 19 – 20.

*Rejoice the Lord is King,
your God and King adore;
Mortals give thanks and sing
and triumph evermore:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice; again I say rejoice.*

*His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules o'er earth and heaven;
The keys of death and Hell
Are to our Jesus given:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice; again I say rejoice.*

*Jesus the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love;
When He had purged our stains
He took His seat above:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice
Rejoice; again I say rejoice.*

*Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the Judge shall come,
And take His servants up
To their eternal home:
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
The trump of God shall sound, Rejoice!*

Charles Wesley 1744