

Christmas Day

CHRISTMAS MESSENGERS

Isaiah 52:7-10

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

*7How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*
*8Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.*
*9Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.*
*10The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.*

DIAGNOSIS: Wasting Away

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : No News That's Good News

The people of God have languished. Sentinels may go to the

rooftops, but find no signs of anything on the horizon that indicate life will be better. We sentinels read our newspapers, watch our TVs, hear reports at the water-cooler. Same old news, even depressing news, but certainly not good news.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Without Hope*

After a while, the hearts of sentinels expect bad news. Even the visions of hope begin to fade. After a long exile, the people of God gave up wondering whether God was coming to rescue them. God isn't coming, they thought. Perhaps God is too weak to come, unlike our enemies who are strong; and, notice, their idols seem greater than any hopes we might place in Yahweh. So Israel in exile is a people without hope, a people of despair. We know despair, too.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Without God's Help*

Maybe, though, the problem is deeper than even Israel could imagine. Maybe God doesn't help, doesn't rescue, just leaves the people to fend for themselves. (Paul suggested something similar in God's "giving them up" in Romans 1.) What if our nihilism and cynicism is confirmed by a God who gives us up?

PROGNOSIS: Getting the Message

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Message of Peace*

Yet a messenger runs. His feet are going as fast as he can to bring a Word of promise. "Your God reigns!" "Your God reigns!" One might imagine that the feet of these messengers belong to the shepherds running through Bethlehem. But they are just the messengers. It is God's Message of the coming of the Messiah who brings peace, shalom, that we are called to give our attention! God's Message is comfort! God's Message is redemption! There is peace between God and his people, and God is not giving up on them, or us. That's the Message those shepherd-sentinels heard, and saw, and witnessed. So do we, very meaningfully, very visibly, receive peace and good news in the birth of the

Message... the Messiah, Jesus. This Message is about God bringing peace to his people by making peace through the death of that Son. But silence is not the end of the Message; this Message ends in Life. This Messiah brings a salvation that endures through death into new life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Hearing, and Seeing, Salvation*

Listen! See! These are synonyms for faith. Turn your ears toward the source of this Message, oh sentinels! Witness this good news from the rooftops. Expect it, look for it, hear good news once again. It is in plain sight (v. 8), in plain hearing, for us to behold in wonder again this Christmas morning. Comfort, peace, hope is born in our midst, and by faith we behold the glory of the Message in our midst!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Singing for Joy*

The news-writers and messengers of all that's old cannot begin to fathom the immense good and promising news that there is to publish. And publish it we do, fellow sentinels, as we place our feet alongside those shepherds long ago (and many, many other faithful witnesses of the good news of the Messiah who has come). Now is the time to break forth in songs of great joy and spread the news: The Message has arrived—and it's (he's) good news!