

Prayer for the Feet of Gospel Workers

Isaiah 52:-10; Luke 10:1-12

Summer Sermon Series on Prayer

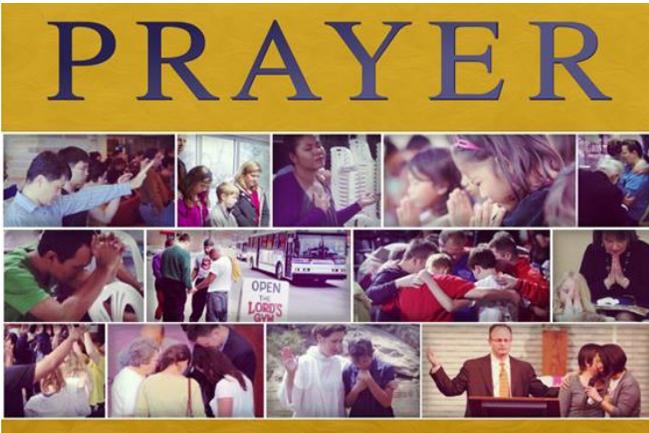
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

July 13, 2014

TEXT: Isaiah 52:7-10; Luke 10:1-12

This morning we continue in our series on prayer. We are looking at different prayers in Scripture and opportunities to deepen our own prayer lives as individuals, families, and as a



church family. We've heard messages so far on prayer of adoration, prayer for Christ likeness, a prayer of outcry against injustice, and last week, a prayer to receive Christ. This morning, we turn our attention to a short, but weighty, prayer of our Lord Jesus in a prayer for the mission of the church in the world. Specifically, we'll link this prayer with the imagery from Isaiah and the prayer for the feet of gospel workers. We want to think

about our feet this morning and connect these two passages: Isaiah 52 and Luke 10, as we listen to the Lord's instructions that we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His fields, fields of mission that, according to Jesus, are ripe for harvest.

Isaiah 52 is a single, controlled image that is deeply moving. Isaiah 52:7 begins:

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news."

Most of us do not think of our feet as the most attractive part of our person, so it's a little bit jarring to think, "Wow, what beautiful feet!" Yet, these feet are not beautiful by their length or width or lack thereof. They're not distinguished in their beauty by anything that is painted on them. They are beautiful because they are feet of a messenger who is coming over the hillside, and this messenger is bearing good news. When Isaiah is translated into Greek, the messenger is literally the one who is bringing the Gospel, this most precious of words to us. This messenger is coming over the hill, and his feet are beautiful, not by their shape, but by the news that he brings. His news is tidings of peace; the news of the messenger is good; the news of the messenger is salvation; the news of the messenger is a climactic declaration that our God reigns. The feet of the messenger of Isaiah 52 are beautiful because they bring a proclamation

of the Gospel announcement, massive tidings, peace, goodness, salvation, and the reign of God. Isaiah's messenger brings joy to the hearers of his proclamation. The imagery expands in Isaiah 52:8, as we see that the messenger who is coming over the hillside is coming to address a city.

“Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

The messenger's news reaches those stationed on the walls. We discover, as the imagery pans backwards, that there are people stationed all along the borders of the ramparts of the city, watchmen watching day and night, just like the prodigal son's father looking out, awaiting news from afar. These watchmen are positioned to await the sighting of this messenger, and when they see the messenger and hear the announcement of the Gospel, they raise their voices in jubilation. They shout for joy. The watchmen on top of the walls communicate to one another, and this is single messenger's announcement of salvation and the reign of God now thunders into this course of watchmen stationed around the city. Together they shout for joy for the Lord's return to Zion. The eyes of the watchmen are filled with an expectant waiting, and those longing eyes are satisfied with the arrival of the messenger. The watchmen burst into song, and then the song of celebration and joy radiates down from the walls inside the city itself as the imagery continues in Isaiah 52:9:

“Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.”

The single messenger comes. The watchmen see him coming announcing salvation, and they burst into song. The inhabitants of the city now join this mighty song of celebration, good news for those who dwell within the walls. Then, in Isaiah 52:10, this joy of the Lord's return radiates out from the city and spills out to the very ends of the earth. Isaiah 52:10 says:

“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.”

This image of God's baring His holy arm is a sacred image in Scripture used in Exodus when God reaches out with a mighty, powerful arm to save. The gospel of Isaiah 52 is an announcement that God has come. He has returned with good news of salvation, and this news is for all peoples.

One of my favorite places in the world to stand in is a square called Monastiraki Square in Greece. When you come out from the Metro Station and stand in Monastiraki Square, you look up from Monastiraki and see a cross-section of all the world. In a single line of sight, there is before you a slice of the history of the world. You look up at the top of the Acropolis and you see the Parthenon and the buildings on the top. When you come down from the Parthenon, you see a large, medieval Byzantine church. Moving forward from that church, you see the

remnants of a library built by the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Moving forward from that library, you see a Turkish mosque. As you move from that mosque closer back to the square where you are standing, you see a Metro station, an open public square, and you see what looks to be an intersection of all the world. There are people from all over the world moving in and through this open space. When you stand at Monastiraki, you feel the history of the world before you; you sense the movements of the peoples of the world today; and your heart begins to pound to see the activity of God in the world today in the movement of these peoples, the spiritual opportunities all around you. When you go to Monastiraki in the evening, the square becomes filled with people who are immigrants or refugees, and they come and fill the square. They take turns in the square to play music or to dance and to try to earn a few euros from the mass of people. Thousands of people mill through the square. As you stand in Monastiraki, you sense the great spiritual opportunities of the times in which we live. You see people from closed-access countries moving past you with opportunities to hear the Good News. You feel that joy and thrill of seeing God at work, but you also feel the weight of the spiritual responsibility of our time. You sense that the candle of the evangelical church in the city is small, a flickering flame in a city with five million people in it and only 70 evangelical churches. There are 70 ethnic churches proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. You feel the weight of this in the hour in which we live. You can feel excitement and also be tempted to despair to think how we can meet such a need. Who will speak to the thousands of people gathered in the square, people who are moving in and out of this city, and people who are moving in and out of ours as well? The need is grave, and when you feel the overwhelming nature of that spiritual opportunity with the backdrop of the history of the world, then you can take comfort by looking just a little bit to the right. When you look just a little bit to the right, you see a rocky outcrop peeking into your frame of view, and that rocky outcrop is Mars Hill. You know that against impossible odds, the Apostle Paul stood on that hill 2000 years ago and proclaimed a God that the people did not know. He proclaimed Him with boldness, and hearts were opened to respond.

One of the great benefits of short-term missions is the effect on your own heart. When you see God working in a different corner of the world, you get into the mentality that "I want give everything I have for the Lord. I don't want to waste any opportunity that I have." As our team traveled this summer to Greece, before we even left the Cincinnati airport, a man overheard our conversation and came up to us and said, "I heard you saying that you are going to Athens. I've just come from there. May I pray for your team?" We felt surrounded by God's people. While we were on the airplane, I had an incredible opportunity to share Christ with the woman next to me. When you're moving and risking for the Lord, obeying His call to move, you get into the mindset that you want to keep and hold on to when you come back: to live in constant vigilance for God's opportunities all around. Isaiah's picture of the messenger is a picture of a messenger whose feet are beautiful because they bring a knowledge of the Gospel to people all

around, and it is for this reason that the messenger's feet are beautiful.

We now turn to Luke 10. Here our Lord Jesus is instructing as He sends out messengers, workers into the field. I believe the imagery of Isaiah 52 stands behind this passage, for Luke 10:1 begins:

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go.”

They were royal messengers sent to go in advance of the King. In Luke 9, Jesus had sent out the 12 apostles. They are named, and we know them. We are tempted to think this would be sufficient for global evangelization. How many more points of the compass are there? Just send these 12 out; they will do the job. But thankfully our Lord knows us well and has given us the tremendous privilege of being conscripted into His service. Luke 10 continues with not just 12, but 72 others whose names are not given, for indeed the vast majority of Christ's servants in the world are known only to Christ. It is an honorable group, although their names are known only to God. They are sent out to every city and place where the Lord was about to go, so they are royal messengers coming in advance of the King. Jesus then says in Luke 10:2:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”

We are instructed to ask the Lord to send out workers. Martin Luther said that prayers should not be measured by their length, but by their weight, and this is a weighty prayer of Jesus. Jesus instructs us to ask God to send out people into fields that are, in His view, white unto harvest. There is a wonderful verb change in Luke 10:2. In Luke 9, He sends out apostles. *Apostello* in Greek means *to send*, and they were sent out, as it were, with the fanfare of the Lord. The 72, though, are not sent out. The word is *ekballo* which means *to be thrust out*. I sense in this image that the Lord Jesus is saying the 72 needed to be pushed from behind. The 12 had been with Jesus long enough that He could just say, “I'm sending you,” and they went. The 72 are a little bit more like you and me. We need to be pushed from behind and kicked out of the place in which we are standing and into the field. Jesus says: “Pray for workers to be sent.”

Chuck Fox, a dear friend, is an American Baptist missionary and has served in Thailand for decades. He is from Cincinnati and heard God's call to serve overseas. Once, when Chuck was visiting Cincinnati and he was here at Kenwood, we walked back behind the prayer garden. We prayed and stood, just looking at the field. On that particular day, the backfield was just filled with robins. I had never seen so many robins in that field. There were dozens of robins in different sections of the field, and they were all doing the same thing. It wasn't particularly

beautiful or moving. Occasionally, with a thrust of the head, a robin would come up with a plump worm. As we stood there, Chuck said to me, "You know, that's what we are. We're just God's migrant workers thrusting our head into the ground in the portion of the field in which He has caused us to rest. That's what we are called to be." Jesus knows us well, and He says in Luke 10:3:

"Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves."

You cannot obey Christ's command to go from your couch or reclining chair in this way. You have to be pushed out, and for some of us, this means going to another part of the world. For others, it means going across the street. For many of us, it's easier to go across the world than it is to go across the street, and yet Jesus says, "Go!" He says: "I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves." It will be dangerous. People will misunderstand you; there will be times when you will fear for your reputation or safety. But Jesus says nevertheless to go. He says in Luke 10:4:

"Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road."

Don't rely on yourself or your own resources or your own networks or relationships, but rely upon the power of the Lord and His commissioning. Notice that the 72 go with the announcement of Isaiah's messenger. In Luke 10:5, they reach the city and speak what Isaiah's messenger says first:

"Peace to this house."

This is the peace of God that comes only through His messengers. No one other than those who belong to Christ is in a position to announce this peace to the world.

While we were on our trip to Greece this summer, I did see sets of feet that were not beautiful to me. There was a very large conference in the city hosted by a cult group. They all had nametags and badges, and they were from many different countries. They could be seen all around the city and were having a big meeting there. My heart broke for those feet, because they were not in a position to proclaim the peace of Christ or the knowledge of Christ, and yet they were moving all around the city. Jesus says offer the peace of Christ. He says in Luke 10:6:

"If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you."

What a tremendous privilege Jesus has given to you and to me to offer the peace of Christ to people for real, not just in word, but in reality.

Jesus continues His instructions, which are very practical, mission-minded instructions. They speak to all of us of keeping the mentality of a missionary in our own place of calling. Jesus says in Luke 10:7:

“Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.”

Jesus says to receive the hospitality that you are offered; do not move around from house to house; do not cause divisions in the place where you are going to serve. Jesus continues in Luke 10:8 with one of the most important concrete missionary instructions of all:

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.”

You have to be flexible; you have to eat whatever you are offered. The time I was stretched the furthest on this point was a time when I was once sitting in a yurt on the border of Kazakhstan, and a man lifted the cover off a pot. There before me was a tray of gray steaming parts of a sheep, all different parts. I could hardly identify them except for the one sitting on top, the large skull of the lamb. The man smiled at me, and I knew he was giving me his best. He picked up the steaming skull and pulled out a knife that was not the type of kitchen cutlery one might expect. I could not say for sure the last time it had been washed. He pulled that steaming gray lamb skull up, smiling at me, and slid the knife down the snout and offered me the meat. I didn't even think there was meat on the snout of a lamb. I thought if he's prepared to eat it, then I will, and I ate it and I lived to stand here today before you. We were not stretched on this trip to Greece because we were treated with great hospitality. We ate well. The most moving meals that we had in our class were prepared by a man who had been in the Taliban prison for his faith in Jesus Christ. He cooked for us so that on our breaks we could eat and continue studying and learning. We ate whatever we were offered, receiving the hospitality, for when you eat with someone, you get close to them. Jesus says to share this table fellowship.

Jesus continues and says in Luke 10:9:

“Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'”

Meet concrete needs. This morning we are commissioning two different teams: the children and family ministry team to Costa Rica, and the youth mission team to Boston. Both of these teams will be serving very concrete needs, and, according to Jesus, that is a real and vital part of mission. But, they also announced the Gospel, for Jesus says to heal the sick **and** tell them the kingdom of God has arrived. This is the message of Isaiah 52, that your God reigns and the kingdom of God has come. It is a great privilege to be in the service of Jesus Christ. Jesus says that our calling to herald this Good News is relevant for all of the earth, including the place where we live. Jesus says it is this testimony which must be received and should not be rejected. This passage ends on a very sad note. Jesus says in Luke 19:10-12:

“But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The

kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."

If the message of the Gospel is rejected, then those beautiful gospel feet must be wiped off. Even the dust of the city must be wiped off as a testimony against the city. But, the beautiful feet of the messenger have come to this place and announced the Gospel, an announcement that must be received, that the kingdom has come. Jesus stirs our hearts and tells us it would be better to have been in Sodom and Gomorrah and experienced the judgment of God, than in that town that rejects the Gospel message of the living God.

Jesus calls us this morning to embrace the prayer for the feet of Gospel workers, to let our hearts swell with this short but weighty prayer of the Lord in Luke 10:2:

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

Ask the Lord to send workers into the harvest. When we were in Athens, the number of workers was insufficient for the task. There were people coming from countries that you could not go to, and we barely had enough workers for this one week intensive ministry. Ask the Lord to send workers, Jesus teaches us to pray.

I want you to look down at your feet and see them in a new way. I want you to see your feet as beautiful, not by their appearance, length or breadth, but I want you to see your feet as beautiful in that you are entrusted with the knowledge of the Gospel of the living God. Wherever you walk and wherever you go, you are called by Jesus to announce these glad tidings. When you pray that the Lord would send workers into the field, your heart will open to the purposes of God today. Kenwood Baptist Church will be blessed as a community that prays this prayer regularly: "Oh, Lord, send workers into Your fields," and pray that the feet of the Gospel workers will be regarded as beautiful by those to whom they are sent. Pray that the feet will not be required to be dusted off at the end.

A.B. Simpson was a great leader many years ago. He had a powerful ministry of evangelism and proclamation of the Word. A man visited him in his home. The man woke up early in the morning and heard a noise in Simpson's study. The door of the study was just barely ajar, and so the man looked in to see Simpson. What he saw there shook him to the core, and he discovered the secret to this man's ministry and mission. There, early in the morning, stood A.B. Simpson draped over a globe, sobbing as though his heart would break for the lost world.

"Oh Lord, send workers into the fields, even me." It would be a dangerous but beautiful additional line of prayer to say: "I will go wherever You call, wherever You invite me to serve." This is a brief, but weighty prayer inspired by our Lord Jesus.

This morning we want to commission into service two groups. Our children and family ministry team are going as families to Costa Rica this week to wash the feet of children and to give them shoes to wear. They'll be handing out Bibles and distributing God's Word. They will be providing encouragement to God's workers in the land. Our youth group is traveling to Boston to serve in an inner-city ministry and mission and to partner with churches there. They are also going to work and provide encouragement. We want to pray for these workers that have heard God's call. I praise God for the core of our Greece team from Kenwood, back just a few hours, yet here to see the next wave of people ready to leave. I want all of us to see our own feet as moving as messengers of the Gospel of the living God. Would you stand with me and reach out your hand towards these teams? We want to commission them now.

Almighty God, we come to You this morning. We are in awe of You, that You have entrusted to us the message of the Gospel. We thank You that the Gospel message comes and finds expectant watchmen wherever it goes. We thank You that the Gospel message thrills hearts of those who hear it, that the cities in which the Gospel message arrives burst into praise. Father, we consecrate these two teams now to You. We pray that You would thrust them out; that You would protect them on their way; that You would give them hearts to serve; that, Lord, You would give them good attitudes, flexibility, willingness to do whatever they are asked, to eat whatever they are asked, to serve in whichever way they are asked. Help them to reflect Jesus as they wash feet and serve. Help them to announce the Gospel clearly, that Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Lord, would You produce fruit in the hearers that there would be those who trust Christ for the first time? Father, we pray for a lasting impact on every family and every individual, on every student and every child, that You would raise up new waves of missionaries in these generations, and that You would include our church as part of this great sending. Lord, we love You; we thank You that You speak week by week, day by day, and we thank You that all of these have heard Your call. We consecrate them, and pray that You would take their lives, take their hands, take their feet, to bring glory to Your Name. Amen.