

Isaiah 52: 1 – 12

'Passage of Hope'

Introduction ...

A magnificent poetic reversal

That's how one commentator – Jo Bailey Wells – describes what's going on in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah.

She writes:

In the previous passage, the people urged God to wake up. In this passage God twice urges his people to wake up. Previously the people urged God to clothe himself with strength; here God urges Zion to put on their garments of strength. The poetic reversal is magnificent.

Contemporary situation ...

Isaiah was speaking these words into a dire situation: in captivity, bondage and lying in the dust ... but a radical reversal is on the cards ... and so they are encouraged to **'Break forth into singing for ... the salvation of their God will be evident.'**

As Christians we understand that God's purposes for Israel were drawn together to be realised in the person of Jesus Christ ... and then widened out again to embrace the whole world, so we can legitimately ask how does this speak into our world this Advent Sunday?

Two things stand out for me: Firstly

- a) **Co-operation with God** – back to that poetic reversal. When we cry out for God to do something ... it may well be that God wants us to be part of bringing about the answer to that prayer. Having faith in God as a Christian doesn't equate to expecting God to wave a magic wand to sort things out. Yes – the world needs God's strength, power, courage ... but God has chosen to work through people.

Secondly this passage

- b) **Reinforces our understanding** that God wants to bring comfort, peace, good news.

I wonder how congregations in Ukraine would react to this passage? Maybe some would react **'Why is this not happening for us?'** When will we hear the good news of **Peace?** Maybe for others it would enable hope to be strengthened.

Conclusion ... Those 2 emphases from this passage:

To work in co-operation with God plus God's desire for peace – shalom – wellbeing can come together this Advent in our response to what is going on in Ukraine – aiming to bring hope and peace ...

By prayer

By giving to Charities providing needed goods or aiding refugees

By supporting our Government in their support of Ukraine

To go back to the start of the passage from Isaiah: **'Awake, awake, put on your strength'**

Amen.