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## O Thou that Tellest Good Tidings of Zion... (Isaiah 40:9)

**Introduction** - When you hear this text, especially in the translation used in Handel's *Messiah*, you immediately hear the glory of the music. But do not miss the glory of the proclamation itself. These are Good Tidings. They are to be shouted from the highest mountain without fear. This is Good News to fallen Jerusalem, to the cities of Judah, and it would follow, to Samaria and the end of the earth. And what is that Gospel? "*Behold your God!*"

**Get Thee Up Unto the High Mountains** - There is very little that is "private" about Christianity. It is a message to be proclaimed, received and implemented in cities, in culture, in the common and public life of people. Jesus said that a city set on a hill cannot be hidden and that it is silly to light a lamp and then put it under a bucket (Matt 5:14-16). From the mountaintop, Jesus wants cities, not just individuals. This is what it means to disciple the nations. This is why Jesus came here to earth, rather than simply taking us to heaven.

**Without Fear** - "*Be not afraid,*" said the angels (Luke 2:10), and Jesus has told us not to fear men who only can kill the body, but to fear God, who can destroy both body and soul (Matt 10:28).

**The Good Tidings** - In order for there to be Good News that turns the tide, there must have been bad news. Of course, in Isaiah, this comes on the heels of all of the judgment God has proclaimed upon a disobedient and rebellious people. For Adam in his fall, for Israel in Isaiah's day, for first-century Palestine, and for this race of sinners in the twenty-first century, it is the same. How are we to deal with our guilt, our alienation from God, and our misery?

**Guilt from Sin** - We all have sinned, and we all know it (Rom 3:23, 1:18). Because we are God's creatures, we already are under His ultimate authority. But, in Adam, we broke covenant with God and are in violation of our appointed relationship to Him. Everyone has implicitly, if not formally, renounced his or her allegiance, disowned His right over us, and set up our lives and this world for ourselves, just as Jesus described in the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12:1-11). Ultimately, secular humanism is just waiting for that which it cannot stop - our death and final judgment. This guilt over our sin blinds us, stops our ears, and keeps us from dealing honestly with Truth. But even this is in His hand (Isaiah 6:9-10). This is actually good news because God can do something about it even though we cannot.

**Behold Your God** - Jesus has come to deal with your guilt, your sin, and your condemnation. He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found (as we shall sing). We celebrate the birth of Jesus because He has come in the flesh, taking on humanity for just this very purpose (2 Cor 5:21).

**Alienation from God** - The hard truth is this: in Adam we became and live on as haters of God (Rom 1:30) and we are quite comfortable with ourselves in this natural state. We vainly create other 'gods,' sometimes even calling those gods the god of the Bible; but we are simply producing excuses for our sin, empty justification that is supposed to keep us from an eternity of deserved wrath and punishment. Our carnal minds are at war with God (Rom 8:7). We will not make His glory our chief end - we refuse. And we are like Cain towards any brother who would love God rightly - we will murder him (1 John 3:11-12).

**Behold Your God** - Jesus has come to be from the line of Adam, a new son of Adam who comes to reconcile us to God. While we were yet sinners (haters of God), Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). Saul of Tarsus thought himself so right with his version of the God of the Bible and the way of salvation, justifying his own rebellion as he persecuted Christians (Acts 9:1-20). But Jesus came to him by light and a voice from heaven, and Saul was converted. How many of us were hard-hearted towards God, towards His law, towards His words of conviction and judgment - and towards His words of help - until God melted our hearts, opened our eyes, and turned us towards our Savior. This Savior slays His enemies by making them His friends - and all at His own cost by becoming a Man Himself to die in our place.

**Misery from the Fall** - Because of our guilt and alienation, we and all of creation groan in misery (Rom 8:20-22).

Although there are marks throughout creation of God's general grace, tokens of His goodness and longsuffering, it likewise abounds with marks of His displeasure. "*I think we have sufficient reason to attribute earthquakes, hurricanes, famine, and pestilence, to sin as their original and proper cause...maybe far worse are the evils which we bring upon each other. The dreadful consequences of war, plunder, discord, hatred, ambition, avarice, and intemperance, furnish part of every page in the mournful history of human life, and are felt in every nation, city, village, and family*" -John Newton. Why do we need keys and locks, guns and safe-boxes, borders and border-patrols? Why is there so much disease and deformity? Why is there so much famine and poverty in the world? Why are tyrants allowed to rule, rape, and destroy?

**Behold Your God** - What are we proclaiming? In the midst of this judgment, God has sent His Son to establish His new,

spiritual kingdom upon this earth. Afflictions still await us, but now they are sanctified. Now they are appointments graciously designed for our advantage. Our crosses and our comforts are now tokens of God's favor (Heb 12:6-7), we are assured of support under them (2 Cor 12:9), and we have the promise of final deliverance, justification, and uninterrupted, inconceivable glory (Rev 21:4).

**Behold Your God** - Why should we shout this from the mountaintops? Why should we demand obedience and glory to this God? Why should you say and explain "Merry Christmas" to your neighbor, co-worker or friend? Can you empathize with their guilt over sin - can you see it in their scowl, their frown, or their drunken parties? Can you sympathize with their alienation from God - can you see that they see themselves ultimately in the cross-hairs of His judgment - can you see their fear of death? Can you feel with them in the misery that comes from His displeasure? But He has told us - go tell them - *Merry Christmas* - why? Behold, your God! Joy to the world - the Lord is come!

*Dave Hatcher - December 18, 2005*