

November 8/9, 2003

2003 Missons Conference

Beautiful

Romans 10:11-15

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What comes to your mind when you think of the word “beautiful”? Think about that for a minute. Mentally fill in the blank: _____ is so beautiful! I think I often come back to some of the wondrous works that God has made in His creation—like a perfect flower set against the peaceful sky. It is *beautiful*. Or how about an amazing sunset? It could be right out your own window or over majestic mountains. It is *beautiful*. What about when you walk outside and the moon is so bright. It just seems to bring to life all of the surrounding billowy clouds. That is *beautiful*. How about a radiant bride, standing outside on her most special day. *Beautiful*. Or a wide-eyed infant taking in all the wonders of the world. *Beautiful*.

When I think about the word beautiful, I think about the wonders of God’s work, and they are beautiful. But have you ever stopped to wonder how God would fill in the blank? When would God say, “_____ is so beautiful”? Surely He would have those and many other of His amazing works in His creation on a list if He were to make one. The Old Testament tells us of many times when things just like that are referred to as beautiful. It is interesting that in the New Testament there are only a few. One of them is actually a bit surprising.

Turn with me to Romans 10. In Romans, the apostle Paul has written an incredible letter laying out lots of the essential theology of our faith. In chapter 10, he is continuing this process by addressing the battle over law and grace, righteousness by faith or by works. In verses 8 and 9, he again reaffirms the definitive conclusion of Scripture that our righteousness cannot be earned. Rather, it is a gift of God appropriated by faith. And then verse 11:

For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for “Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.” (vs. 11-13)

It does not matter who you are. It does not matter where you are from. The answer is the same for every human heart. Salvation is found only through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other answer. There is no other way. And even our greatest attempts to obey commandments and do good works lead to a righteousness that is as filthy rags. But in Christ everything changes. In Christ we find hope. In Christ we find forgiveness. In Christ we find life. Placing our faith in Him changes everything. And it is in this context that God points out something truly beautiful. It is interesting because most of the things that we refer to as beautiful are things that God alone has done. But here in Romans 10, God calls something beautiful that we can do with Him and for Him. Verse 14:

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” (vs. 14-15, *NASB)

Now, anybody who has given much consideration to the first century culture might see the irony in calling feet beautiful. Those were the days of open-toed sandals and dusty roads. Dirty, calloused, well-worn feet would hardly seem to merit categorization with sunsets and brides. But there it is: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” It is a reminder that true beauty is often

below the surface. For certainly the reference here is metaphorical, not to the beauty of the feet themselves, but rather to what their journey represents.

In verses 13-15, Paul is laying out a reverse sequence. It is our feet in motion that begins the process that culminates with the great news of verse 13:

For “Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.”

But how can you call on one you don't believe in? It just won't happen. And how can you believe in someone you have never even heard of? It is impossible. And how can you hear if someone doesn't speak? There is no way. And who is going to go and speak unless someone tells them to go and speak? Probably no one. So a critical key to every life being completely changed is feet in motion, headed forward and moving out with purpose, on a mission to proclaim the goodness of what God has done in Christ. It is to speak of Christ and His salvation. Then those living in darkness, without God and without hope, might hear and believe and place their faith in Christ, joining us as a part of God's great family. What could be more beautiful?

In the days of Romans 10, God had called and sent out Paul and others to proclaim His good news. And to this very day, He continues to do the exact same thing, calling each and every single one of us to be a part of His plan in making Christ known across the street and all the way around the world. Every time our feet move out to bring the good news to those who have never heard or to those who still just don't understand, God's response is the same: Beautiful!

That is what missions is about. Here in Lincoln and all over the globe, we as a church family are intentionally involved in proclaiming the gospel to seekers, to unbelievers, and to the completely unreached. This weekend and next we focus together on the great privilege and the high priority that we have to reach others, as we focus on our annual Missions Conference. This year things are going to be just a little bit different. Rather than me or someone else giving a long message, we want to give you the chance to hear from several of our people who have beautiful feet.

We have titled these weekends “Mission W: Who? What? Why? Where?” because we want each of us to be reminded of why missions is so important. We want to discover a bit more of what we are doing and what God is doing through us. And we hope to grow in our understanding of who our missionaries are and where it is that God has opened doors for us as a church family to make Him known throughout all of the earth.

I want to get right to that. But before I do, I want to ask you just one question. What do your feet look like? Would God call them beautiful? Are you involved in bringing good news to lost people? If so, how? If not, how come? Because it really is one of the greatest privileges we have as believers—to be involved in helping to change the eternal destiny of someone. When someone receives God's gift of forgiveness, new life, and salvation, it truly is beautiful. And we can be a part of that. I hope that through this next week you will continually ask the Lord to lead you towards being more intentional about declaring His goodness to people near and to people far, through your own lives, and through the ministries of our church—for that is beautiful.

As most of you know, we as a church family do have the privilege of being involved all over the world. We have sent out 43 missionaries and missionary families to countries on five continents across the globe. During our Missions Conference focus we will be giving you a glimpse of what is happening in Africa, Europe, South America, here in the US, and a detailed look at our new church planting partnership in India. (Interviews with missionaries followed this message.)