

How beautiful are thy feet

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Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Dr G.N.M.Collins

[0 : 00] Would you now turn with me to the Old Testament Scriptures and to Solomon's song, the Song of Solomon, Chapter 7. And you will find the words to which I, in particular, wish to invite your attention this evening in the first verse.

Solomon's Song, Chapter 7, in the first verse. And the first clause of the verse. How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers once disclosed that in his Bible reading, and he used to read in course, when he came to the Song of Solomon, he never thought of reading it without, first of all, offering this prayer.

My God, spiritualize my affections. Give me a more intense love to thee.

And these are indeed the prime requisites of a profitable study of the Song of Solomon throughout.

[1 : 23] Spiritual affections. A more intense love to God.

Now there are many nowadays who think that the Bible could do very well lacking this little book. Indeed, they seem to indicate that they feel it would be better without it.

It's too emotional, too sentimental. Particularly too erotic. It's just a love song and that's all. And they don't see that it is in the right setting.

In the place that it occupies in the Old Testament. But to speak like that is to reveal that one doesn't have the spiritual mindedness that Chalmers wanted for himself.

And that one has missed completely the whole purpose of this inspired song. Calvin used to speak of the Song of Solomon as the Holy of Holies in the Temple of the Word.

[2 : 34] And to the spiritually minded man that is indeed what it is. The Holy of Holies in the Temple of the Word. This is a place to which only the saint can come in the expectation of benefit.

He can enter into the spirit that pervades this Holy of Holies. And here he can hold communion with God through Jesus Christ.

Yes, it's a song of the New Testament as well as of the Old. And it wouldn't have been a song of the Old Testament were it not intended that it should be also a song of the New. Coming in that spirit we shall surely profit.

What then are we to make of this statement? Which at the first reading seems to have so little to offer us. How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter.

It's a love song alright, there's no question about that. But it's rather strange beginning for the lover to concentrate on the beloved's feet and upon his foot gear.

[3 : 55] because as we learn from the New Testament and Paul's references to the beautiful feet that bring tidings of salvation.

This is something that attracts the whole interest and attention of the believer of the feet the feet of Jesus Christ that brought him into this world and through the ways of this world through the ages of history exhibiting the Father's love and causing multitudes to say from age to age we love him because he first loved us.

And yet having said all that it's rather a cryptic text to face.

How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter. Is there something that we can learn from these words tonight? I think there is and a great deal.

And I should like us first of all to take these beautiful shoes and the feet that they encase in a gospel sense and regard those shoes as signs of emancipation.

[5 : 31] As you know in olden time and particularly in the Orient the kind of foot gear that a person used if he did use foot gear at all was an indication of his state of his station in life of the level of society which he belonged.

It's particularly true of the shoes of Eastern ladies that they were richly ornamented so as to convey the message that they were of very high distinction.

But really without any particular adornment or embroidery the very fact that the person was wearing shoes at all indicated privilege that he was a privileged person a person of a very definite status. the slave as you know didn't wear shoes. Often when soldiers taken captive in battle were led away from the scene of conflict to be exhibited as tokens of their conquerors triumph part of their degradation was to lose their distinctive military dress and particularly to lose their shoes. they were made to walk barefoot after the soldiers who had overcome and captured them so that the bare feet were an indication of defeat and degradation.

[7 : 39] Does the message of these words then begin to appear? Evidently the bridegroom here is talking to a bride who was raised from great degradation.

We sung about it a little while ago. He from the dust hath raised the poor that very low doth lie and from the dung he lifts the man who pressed with poverty that he may highly him advance and with the princes said even those that of the princes are the chief the princes great so that the shoe clad foot is an indication of freedom and in the case of a person who was at one time a slave or a person belonging to some very very low level of society an indication of promotion and we have to understand that from our text.

For the person who is being addressed here is the church and the church is composed of sinners men and women who were rescued from a degraded condition and who are given and who are given the tokens of a new and higher station in life and the change is so tremendous and far reaching and transforming and transfiguring even that the bridegroom as he beholds the change says how beautiful beautiful are thy feet with shoes O princess daughter now that doesn't mean that to be a believer promises easy ways comfortable going from the time of the acceptance of Christ to the very end of the journey the believer according to the ways of life that he takes has frequently got to have a change of foot gear but he's always got foot gear he never goes back to the old slavery he that committed sin said Jesus in words that we read tonight is the servant or the slave of sin but once the transforming work of the

Holy Spirit takes place in that soul the bondage is passed if the son shall make you free said Jesus to those Jews who disputed with him you shall be free indeed not just in your own fancy as those Jews whom he's addressing were who were protesting we'd be Abraham's children we were never in bondage to any man free they said we are free but they weren't free indeed they were free only in the sense of their own delusion you remember what happened to the prodigal son when he came back from the far country from that condition of degradation to which he descended where he wasted his substance with riotous living his condition of coming back as indicated in the parable he needed many new things you can gather that from the charge that the father gave to the servants bring forth the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and don't miss it shoes on his feet he hadn't had that for many a day and there is a sense indeed in which as we apply this text in the gospel there is a sense in which we never knew what it was to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace until we were brought into that condition by

Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit no longer a slave this said the father my son was dead but is alive again and that word dead covers all the degradation of the far country all its servitude all its evil all its corruption he was dead he was a slave as John Adams pithily remarks many lusts many masters he had many lusts he wasted his substance with riotous living and these lusts became his masters he thought they were going to be his servants bringing him happiness but they didn't they brought him instead the misery of the far country and that as Jesus indicates in his application of that parable was what he came into the world to do it had been foretold long before he came that he was to come that the spirit of the Lord

[13 : 59] God was to be upon him because the Lord had appointed him among other things to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that were bound so that today if we are wearing the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace it is an indication that we have become new creatures in Jesus Christ one of the most moving pictures that we have in the whole of the Old Testament is surely that in the first book of Samuel which tells us of Absalom's rebellion and what that meant for David Jerusalem was under sea according to the signs it would soon be in the hands of the rebel chief

Absalom and David and his men felt that they would be doing the kingdom of greater service by leaving Jerusalem and planning their campaign elsewhere but it was a sad sight to see the king

made a fugitive in his own kingdom by his own son that foolishly indulged son and his departure from Jerusalem is described thus that he went out from Jerusalem ascending the Mount of Olives weeping as he went with his head bare and with no shoes on his feet not that he had lost his honour but it was a sign of his degradation through the action of his own son no longer to be regarded by a large section of the kingdom as king but rather as a man rejected and scorned so you see that the embroidered shoe on the foot of the princess the

Shulamite was a sign of emancipation if any man be in Christ he's a new creature all things are passed away behold all things have become new again let us think of this text as conveying something to us of the joy of the believer let's regard this provision the provision of the beautiful shoes as a token of joy as the putting off of the shoe denoted grief as I have been saying in the case of David the putting on of the shoe was an indication of joy as in the case of the prodigal put shoes on his feet and re-clothed by a loving father raised above the sordid servitude of the far country the prodigal who seated at the feast that had been prepared to celebrate his return and we read they began to be merry and the lesson of it is there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repented and there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over that event there surely is joy in the presence there is joy in the heart of the believer himself who now penitent takes his place not as a servant but as a son heirs of God is Paul's description and joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ now again I say that doesn't mean that the believer is going to have a good time of it an easy time of it for the rest of his life there is the joy of salvation but we don't forget the petition of the psalmist restore me thy salvation joy it's a thing that become not lost altogether but heavily clouded and because the believer knows the preciousness of the thing which he has lost he is a sad man until

God in his mercy restores it and what brings about these lapses and these losses including the loss of the joy of salvation the believer doesn't lose salvation but he can I say lose the joy of it for a time well the answer that comes most readily to us of course is sin if we lapse from the profession that we made if we turn aside from the counsel of God then we cannot expect things to continue as they were the joy becomes clouded the sense of the divine presence is no longer there or if it's there at all it's there in a very feeble way and there is nothing for it when that happens but to come back again as the prodigal did and as the backslider must do as

[20 : 16] David did where he offered that prayer restore me the joy of thy salvation give give me a sense and a token that that status to which thou didst exalt me is still mine that's what he was asking for and the church has addressed in our text has precisely that a sense that all is well between her and Christ that he has healed her backsliding that he has given her again the joy which for a time she lost and in token of that she wears the embroidered shoes of high standing once again may we take these embroidered shoes as the symbol of activity to put on the shoe meant that work had to be undertaken when the angel who delivered

Peter appeared to him in his cell it was this command guard up thy loins and put shoes upon my feet both requirements had a similar message they combined indeed in indicating the nature of the message he was getting his freedom but he was getting his freedom with a definite purpose and for a definite purpose God had work for him to do God had opened the prison gates for him and God was now asking him to equip himself for the task that awaited guard up thy loins it's the action of a man who is going to take a journey as the putting on of the shoes is also and

Peter went out from the prison from its bondage into the service of his master now you will recall how again and again and again Paul uses the figure of walking as suggesting the believer's activity the whole activity of his life as he have received the Lord Jesus Christ so walk in him he addresses that injunction though not always in those words to the different people to whom he sends his epistles he told the

Ephesians rather in that portion from the Ephesians letter that we read tonight that they had work to do that sixth chapter of Ephesians is a real call to activity and strenuous activity of that at that activity that required the whole armor of God and the communication of the power of God stand in the Lord and the power of his might and you'd have noticed in the description of the Christian armor that he gives in that sixth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians he's mentioned of the shoes the preparation of the gospel of peace as shoes for your feet that's the believers business to spread abroad the gospel of peace he was brought into the knowledge of that gospel himself when the Lord gave him shoes for his feet at his conversion and at the beginning of his service and this is a reminder to us that God expects our feet to be at his service and when I say our feet to be at his

service I mean every faculty of our being to be surrendered in sincere consecration to God go ye he said to his disciples having set them free from the bondage of sin and brought them into the joy of a new relationship with God go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature he committed to them that gospel that had brought peace to themselves peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and he now asks them to go with that gospel to others men and women are always seeking for peace but unfortunately we seek it too often in places where it can never be found it's something that we can never work out for ourselves we can do a great deal by way of maintaining the conditions of peace but we can never come into possession of peace save through this act of consecration which God requires of us that we should guard ourselves and put on also the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace and thus be entirely in the service of him who is the prince of peace peace and thus this doesn't apply although it has a primary application to the missionary who goes to lands abroad but it doesn't apply exclusively to the shall we say professional missionary it applies to every believer ye are my witnesses we are to be at work for God wherever we are and whatever we are doing

[27 : 15] Francis Ridley Habergall wasn't a missionary in that sense of the word but she was in another and a very full and comprehensive sense and you remember her prayer take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee it was a prayer for complete head to foot consecration and the prayer was abundantly answered now although this really describes the believer and is a beautiful description it is one that the believer sometimes simply cannot apply to himself after all it is the people who stand closest to

God who see how at their very best they are so immeasurably inferior to the God whom they adore this joy that has come to them through the gospel is not of their own deserving it's bestowed upon them we are indebted to Christ for it and let me say again this reminds us that God expects activity from us he did from his first disciples and he told them what it was and he will tell us if we listen he'll send us to places perhaps where we wouldn't want to go and where indeed we wouldn't go but that he sends us the man out of him who cast the legion of devils wanted to be with him for so ever he might go he'd feel more secure like that and think of the privilege that would be his always with Jesus who delivered him always enjoying his teaching always knowing the joy of his nearness and yet that wasn't the way that Jesus wanted him to take just then go home to thy friends and tell them tell them about it all how great things the Lord hath done for thee and he went and began to publish in Decapolis how great things the Lord had done for him and all men did marvel now lastly I should like to take the brodered shoes more surely although

I've touched on this already as the emblem of complete consecration there's an alternative translation of our text that runs like this how pleasant are thy treadings with shoes O Prince's Daughter the believer as I've already been saying is a treading person a person who's on the business of his master and that's to be his business for the rest of his time in this world beautiful treading things he spoke of the beauty of those feet that brought

Jesus over the mountains of separation into this world of sin how beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings tidings of good things, tidings of peace and Paul uses that description with respect also to the Lord's messengers the feet that bear the tidings of his gospel that carry the message of Jesus Christ not necessarily in a preached sermon but in the variety of other ways in which that can be done that carry the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the different parts of the country which they frequent they're fulfilling their vocation ye shall be my witnesses and they are whatever may be their daily occupation they are witnesses for Christ as he wanted his disciples to be in Jerusalem in all Judea in Samaria and to the ends of the earth it's a call to full consecration emancipation for service now sometimes

[33 : 22] I dare say we when we take stock of ourselves we get a bit depressed about the condition in which we find ourselves or not that we are like those Gibeonites who came to the Israelites when the Israelites were taking possession of Canaan and the Gibeonites wanted to pretend that they didn't belong to the to that country at all we come they said from a far country and they came as you remember in old clothing and in old worn shoes to give color to their story that there were aliens who had just come along and that they ought to be dealt with in a different way from the inhabitants of the land they were ought not to be to be reckoned enemies but that's the foot gear of the hypocrite and sometimes in his worst moments the believer may be tempted to think that that's what his foot gear is after all he's not living up to the standard that he has set for himself and if he cannot do that how can he reach the standard of God well my dear friends the only way is to keep

close to God himself and if you have reason to fear that our consecration is defective that it is not what it used to be and certainly that it is not what it ought to be then let us come with true humility to the throne of grace to hear these words from the Christ who undertook for us and who will complete what he began in us for as Paul tells the Philippians he who began a good work and you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ and those beautiful feet that went around on the master's service in this world feet that sometimes had to walk through the valley of the shadow feet that passed through the valley of Bera on the way to Jerusalem the shoes are still there at the end of the journey and they're unspoiled that was one of the great wonders that God wrought for Israel on their way to the promised land from Egypt their shoes did not wear hold upon them they lasted them for the whole journey and certainly these shoes with which God provides his people today have the same quality of endurance they shall never wear out they would bring the wearer right through to the heavenly

Canaan just as those shoes brought the Israelites into the earthly Canaan to be forever with the Lord and to praise him for this miracle of transformation that he wrought in them and to him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and amid his kings and priests unto God and his father to him be the glory may he add his blessing let us pray O Lord our God thou knowest our need and thou hast made provision against it thou knowest the servitude to which we descended through sin and thou knowest Lord how again and again sin prevails against us yet we cherish the confidence that the psalmist had that as for our iniquities thou wilt purge them away so deal with us tonight and if in thy presence our consecration is defective cause us to know it and cause us to seek the remedy where our Lord is to be found at the throne of grace bless to us this Sabbath and all its mercies and abide with us in Jesus name and for his sake
Amen