

How Beautiful Are the Feet

Message 3: [*I am with you always series*](#)

D E Wasake, a slave of Jesus the Christ

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Anchor Verse

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good things,
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'*

Isaiah 52:7 (NKJV)

Introduction

The prophet Isaiah paints a picture of a messenger—perhaps dusty, perhaps limping, perhaps ignored—but God sees their feet as beautiful. Why? Because of the *message* they carry.

Today we will walk back in time. To the highlands of Bugisu. To the morning mist at Nabumali. To a school built under a mango tree. To the worn boots of William and Mary Crabtree, British missionaries sent by the Church Missionary Society in the 1890s. They came not with swords, but Scripture. Not with wealth, but the Word.

And because they came—because they walked, faith came into homes like mine.

My grandfather, a boy in Bugisu, used to herd cattle in the hills of Tululu. But when he heard the sound of the missionary drum echoing through the valleys, he would run. Run toward learning. Toward hope. Toward Jesus.

Those were the feet that brought good news.

Today, I invite you to walk with those beautiful feet. To listen to their stories. And to consider how your own feet—dusty, tired, maybe blistered—can still be used by God to carry His peace.

The History of the Crabtrees and Personal Connection

When we speak of missionaries, we must remember they were not superhuman. They were people like you and me—mothers, fathers, teachers—yet touched by God to go beyond the comforts of home and walk into lands unknown.

Reverend William Arthur Crabtree was born in England in 1868. Trained at St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, and Ridley Hall, he was sent out by the **Church Missionary Society (CMS)** in the early 1890s. After beginning his work in Mengo and other parts of central Uganda, he was posted to the eastern region, where the **Bagisu people** (also known as **Bamasaba**) lived under the shadow of **Mount Elgon**.

He and his wife, **Ethel Bronwen**, eventually made their home in **Nabumali**, where they opened a mission station. From there, they reached the villages of **Busiu**, **Budadiri**, and **Bumayoka**, crossing rivers and scaling hills to plant the seeds of the Gospel.

Their journey wasn't glamorous. Many missionaries died shortly after arrival. Diseases like malaria and blackwater fever killed entire teams. One early CMS letter called Uganda "the white man's grave." Yet the Crabtrees came.

"We came," Rev. Crabtree wrote in one of his early reports, "not to be remembered, but that He might be known."

And indeed, most people have never heard of them. But I have. Because I am fruit of that seed.

It was through those **muddy feet of the missionary**, climbing hills, sweating under the Ugandan sun, that the Gospel came to my family.

If Rev. Crabtree were alive today, I believe I would kneel down and wash his feet. Those dusty, blistered, bleeding, faithful feet.

And it's not just my story.

- The first schools in this region? Founded by missionaries.
- The first hospitals? Mission initiatives.
- The first time a child in Budadiri heard that they didn't need to fear the curse of the *bafumu* (witch doctor)? It came from the lips of a missionary with a Bible in one hand and a **hand-carved stool** in the other.

In a moment, I will read to you two letters—fictional, but based on real history—that capture the experience of the Crabtrees. One from **Rev. William**, written to the CMS in London. And one from **Ethel**, written to her sister back in Yorkshire.

Through these letters, you'll hear the truth: that wherever the feet of the Gospel go, *healing follows*. Not just of the body, but of the land. Of the family. Of the soul.

Part 3: The Letters of Rev. William Arthur Crabtree

Letter 1 – July 1, 1904

Nabumali Mission Station, Bugisu

We arrived safely in Nabumali. The road from Jinja nearly took Ethel's life. Fever, fatigue — but God held her. I have never prayed so much like this.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." — Psalm 46:1

A boy named Wamalwa saw our worn boots and asked,

"Did you walk from your God to us?"

I said, "Yes. And He walked with us." I remember the verse that brought us here:

"Go and make disciples of all nations... and I am with you always." — Matthew 28:19–20

Letter 2 – July 14, 1904

Busiu Village

Beside a termite mound, I read the Word aloud. A mother brought her child and whispered:

"I'm tired of the gods who ask for blood. Can your Jesus help?"

That night, the fever broke. The next morning, the mother said:

"Tell me more about your Jesus." I read: "Paul went in, prayed, and laid his hands... and healed him." — Acts 28:8

One step. One healing. One soul at a time.

Letter 3 – August 5, 1904

Mpumudde – Lower Ridge

We've begun building a school.

At dawn, barefoot boys came from Bumayoka. One named **Makyeme** said,

"I heard the drum in my sleep. I want to learn how your God speaks."

He read John 3:16 and paused at:

"He gave His only Son."

Then he asked:

"We sacrifice goats. Your God sacrificed His Son?"

I had no words. Only tears.

Letter 4 – August 18, 1904

Budadiri Hillside

An elder named Wasike accused me:

"You want our children to forget the ancestors."

I replied, "I came to remind them of the One who made their ancestors."

Later, I saw a torn page of Luke tucked in his belt. I remembered:

"So shall My word be... it shall not return void." — Isaiah 55:11

A seed has been planted. We water it with prayer.

Letter 5 – October 14, 1904

Bufumbo Ridge

Imbalu season has begun — circumcision everywhere.

One elder, **Walukhu**, asked me: “You speak of another way. Does your book also cut the skin?”

I read him Genesis 17.

“Abraham was ninety-nine when he was circumcised... and every male in his house.”

He nodded. “Then maybe your God is not so foreign after all.”

We are finding bridges. And I believe — the Lord already laid the stones.

Letter 6

October 27, 1904 – Sironko River

We baptized seven young men today — former attendants of a **lubale priest**.

One of them, **Wamalwa**, brought a charm pouch tied with goat’s blood. He laid it down and said:

“I have a new name now.”

We opened the Bible to **Acts 19**, where new believers in **Ephesus** burned their scrolls and turned from witchcraft:

“And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all... So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”
— **Acts 19:19–20**

Here too — in the hills of Sironko — the Word is prevailing.

A mother said,

“My son was lost in the spirits. Now he sings.”

The fire is spreading.

Not of fear — but of freedom.

Part 4: The Letters of Mrs. Ethel Bronwen Crabtree

Ethel Letter 1

July 14, 1904 – Nabumali

This morning, I moved the children’s bedding from the wall — the roof dripped all night. Everything smells like earth and charcoal.

William left at dawn with nothing but a Masaba Bible and dust-covered boots. I stayed. Seventeen children came — barefoot, some with sores.

One boy, **Nanguli**, recited:

“In the beginning was the Word...” — John 1:1

And the Word was here — in their language, on their lips.

We are not just building churches, Margaret.
We are teaching children to read **God's voice** for themselves.

Ethel Letter 2

July 29, 1904 – Bumayoka Village

A mother brought her son. His eyes sunken, his cry dry.

She whispered:

"If the spirits aren't given blood, they will take him."

I took her hand.

"There is One who already gave His blood – once, for all."

We read:

"We have been made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all." – Hebrews 10:10

That night, the fever broke.

The next morning, she brought millet – not for the spirits... but for us.

Ethel Letter 3

August 10, 1904 – Nabumali

I washed my feet this morning. They are cracked and swollen from long walks.

A girl, **Nandudu**, looked down and asked:

"Mama Etel, why are your feet so ugly?"

I laughed... but later I wept.

Because Isaiah says: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news..." – Isaiah 52:7

My feet may be ugly.

But I pray the message is beautiful.



Ethel Letter 4

August 22, 1904 – Busiu Village

We climbed the path to Busiu. My skirts tore on thorns, and my shoes nearly gave way.

An old grandmother welcomed us with song. She told me:

"When your people first came, I hid.

I thought your Jesus would destroy our ancestors.

But now... I see. He gives us back our children."

Her son – once a drunkard – now teaches the Psalms.

We sat beneath a mango tree and sang:

"The Lord is my shepherd..." — Psalm 23:1

And I wept. Not out of sorrow — but gratitude.
He is building something here.

Ethel Letter 5

September 10, 1904 – Nabumali Mission

The sun set amber behind the hills. William is preaching in Budadiri. I sit alone with frogs and the drum in the distance.

I'm tired. But there is joy.

"Do not grow weary in doing good..." — Galatians 6:9

A girl told me:

"I didn't know your God could speak our language."

But of course He does.

Didn't He come to walk among us?

Even here — in Nabumali — **He walks still.**

Ethel Letter 6

October 11, 1904 – Nabumali

Mary coughed all night. I think it's malaria. The quinine is nearly gone. The doctor is days away.

I held her and whispered:

"He will cover you with His feathers..." — Psalm 91:4

But I was trembling too. What if she worsens?

William leans harder on his cane now. We laugh when we can — usually about burnt posho or Mary calling angels "enjira."

But sometimes I miss the bells of St. John's... warm tea... certainty.

And yet — the drum sounds from Busiu.

A boy is learning his name.

A girl sings "Jesu, lover of my soul" in Masaba.

The Kingdom is coming.

I will not be afraid.

"Do not fear, for I am with you." — Isaiah 41:10

Ethel Letter 7

October 18, 1904 – Nabumali

Life is not easy.

Mosquitoes sing hymns in our ears. Frogs drown out our own.

Mary shares her sweets with the schoolchildren and smiles like a teacher.

Some days, I miss tea and church bells.

But other days – the Spirit visits like rain.

Last week, a widow named **Nambuya**, long shunned, came to our service. We prayed over her trembling hands.

That night, she slept peacefully – the first time in months.

Now she sweeps the schoolyard. And hums:

“Rock of Ages...”

In the evenings, William reads Psalms while the mountains turn blue.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills... my help comes from the Lord.” – Psalm 121:1–2

And that – is enough for me.

END

If you love these crab tree letters – I have written a full devotional focussing on giving you an insight into their lives.

Conclusion – “I Am With You Always”

My grandfather – a boy in the hills of Bugisu – heard the beat of the mission drum and **ran**. Not away – but toward truth. Toward education. Toward Jesus. This is the Jesus who called me and told me to preach the gospel saying: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Matthew 3: 3 (NIV).*

The Gospel reached my family because someone’s feet **carried it**.

And how many of us here today are the **fruit of that obedience**?

Of teachers? Preachers? Evangelists? Missionaries? Aunties and uncles who whispered the name of Jesus to us in the dark?

What Will Your Feet Carry?

I ask you today: What are **your feet bringing**?

Are they bringing peace to your home?

Are they bringing good news to your children?

Are they walking away from bitterness and toward forgiveness?

Let your feet be **beautiful** – not by the shoes they wear, but by the Gospel they carry.

Because wherever **the Gospel walks**, freedom follows.
Wherever it steps, light enters.
Wherever it stands, hope rises.

Lord Jesus,
We thank You for the feet that carried the Gospel to our lands.
For William and Ethel.
For our grandfathers and grandmothers who believed.
Now send **our feet** — to our homes, our workplaces, our neighbors.
Make them beautiful, because of You.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

If these stories have moved you and you want to repent, pray this prayer to start your life as a Christian:

"God of heaven, I confess that I am a sinner and have been one since birth, but I have heard that you can make me new, and you sent your son Jesus to die for me. He rose again, and it is he who can give me his Holy Spirit. Please forgive me and welcome me into your Kingdom; teach me how to follow you. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Lots of love, your brother in the Lord and a slave of Jesus the Christ.

Lord Jesus, come, Maranatha! Amen.