

White As Snow

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[0 : 00] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 1, and if we read again at varsh 18.

Isaiah chapter 1 at varsh 18. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Every time I see a wintery scene, like we've seen in the last few days, I'm always reminded of this wonderful verse in the book of Isaiah.

Because I suppose that when it snows, I don't think it matters how old we are. There's always an element of excitement that snow brings. But especially for children, and I'm sure that maybe the children who are here, I'm sure maybe we're building a snowman this week.

No? Some of you were? Well, we built a snowman and we called him Salty, Salty the Snowman. And we had great fun outside with building Salty the Snowman.

[1 : 23] And all our kids, they were so excited and they were desperate to get outside and play in the snow. Snow brings with it so much fun for the children. Because when the children, they go outside and they can throw snowballs, maybe you were throwing snowballs, maybe at your friends in school, or you can make snow angels, or you can build snowmen, or a snowman, and you can go sledging.

You can do all these things that maybe some of the older folk used to do when they were young. And if you're a parent, or if you're just a kid at heart, like myself, you love it when it snows.

You love going outside to play in the snow. And although it can cause disruption on the roads, and sometimes it can keep the elderly in their homes, and it causes chaos for everything else. But you know, it's been great to see the kids going outside and just playing in the snow and having fun.

But you know, when we see a landscape covered in snow, it not only gives to us this beautiful winter's day, like we've seen maybe yesterday and this morning.

And it gives us this pretty wintery scene. But when we see a landscape covered in snow, it also makes everything look so clean, doesn't it?

[2 : 32] Everything looks so spotless and unpolluted and untouched and untainted. Everything looks so clean and so pure. And you know, that's the imagery that Isaiah is presenting to us in this verse.

Isaiah wants to remind us of what the Lord is able to do in our lives, a sinner. That he's able to make us who are filthy, wretched sinners.

And he's able to make us spotless, unpolluted, clean and pure. The Lord is able to make us, as it says here, as white as snow.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

And I just like us to consider this beautiful verse and its context, because in this verse and the surrounding context, we are reminded of just three simple things, three simple headings, the problem, the plea and the promise.

[3 : 38] The problem, the plea and the promise. So we'll look first of all at the problem, the problem. If you look at verse one, it says there, the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Yosea, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hero heavens and give ear to earth, for the Lord has spoken. Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, but

Israel does not know my people do not understand.

Now the book of the prophet Isaiah, it's one of the most well known, you could say, and one of the most well loved books of the Old Testament.

And Isaiah, he's probably well known for his prophecy about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, where Isaiah, he prophesies about the cross of Jesus Christ nearly 800 years before it takes place. Isaiah prophesies so vividly that the suffering servant would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our inequities, that he would receive the chastisement that would bring us peace and that with his stripes, we would be healed.

[4 : 57] Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 53, it's a vivid foreshadowing of the horrors of Calvary and all that Jesus would endure on behalf of Sinner.

But you know Isaiah, he wasn't just a foreteller who foretold what would happen in the future. Isaiah was also a foreteller. Isaiah was a preacher of the gospel.

He was a herald of the truth. He was a minister of God's word. And we're told in verse one that Isaiah's ministry had spanned the reign of four kings.

His ministry was during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah's ministry was a long ministry.

But it was also a Christ-centered ministry. Because you know for an Old Testament prophet, this prophet who's hidden in the pages of the Old Testament.

[5 : 53] You know he proclaimed so much about Jesus Christ. And you know that even when reading this book of Isaiah, you'd be certain that he was writing it as Jesus was in front of him.

You'd think that he wrote it when Jesus was walking up on the face of the earth. But it was 800 years before Jesus walked on the earth that Isaiah wrote about the birth of Christ and the anointing of Christ and the ministry of Christ and the rejection of Christ and the sufferings of Christ and the death of Christ and the resurrection and even the kingship of Christ.

Isaiah wrote so much about Jesus Christ that this book has often been referred to as the fifth gospel. But even though Isaiah's ministry was a long ministry and a Christ-centered ministry, it was a difficult ministry.

And what made Isaiah's ministry difficult was the sin and the rebellion of the people. The congregation that he preached to week by week is what made his ministry difficult.

Because when Isaiah was called to be the Lord's prophet to foretell and to forth tell the Lord's message to his people, Isaiah had to keep preaching a message of coming judgment to a people who weren't listening and to a people who didn't care and they weren't interested.

[7 : 19] Isaiah had been called to a people who had turned their back upon the Lord to serve other gods. But you know, Isaiah, he had to keep preaching to them. He had to keep preaching the message of God's coming judgment because his calling wasn't to please them.

His calling was to be faithful to the Lord. And in order to be faithful to the Lord, Isaiah had to preach the Lord's message. Judgment is coming.

Judgment is coming. You need to repent because judgment is coming. And that was the problem for the people of Israel. Judgment was coming. They needed to repent.

But they had no interest. They had no care, no concern for their soul. And they were just ignoring all the warnings. They were just running after all their idols. And you know, we can see that in the verses running up to or leading up to verse 18.

Because we're told in verse two, we're told that the people had rebelled against the Lord. And then in verse three, the Lord claims that the people of Israel, they don't know him anymore.

[8 : 25] He says the ox knows its owner, the donkey its master's crib. But Israel does not know my does not know my people do not understand. Then he says, as sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evil doers, children who deal corruptly, they have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

They don't know the Lord anymore. They've turned their back upon the Lord. They don't care what the Lord is saying. But you know what's shocking about the whole thing is that the people of Israel, they still came to worship the Lord.

They still came to church. But in their hearts and in their home life, they were far away from the Lord. And with this, the Lord is criticizing his people for having an appearance of outward religion, but having no love for the Lord in their heart.

And you know, it's just what Jesus said to the Pharisees, isn't it? He even quoted Isaiah. Jesus said to the Pharisees, you hypocrites. And Isaiah prophesied well of you when he said, this people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

And that's what Isaiah was facing, a people who were just giving lip service to the Lord. They were just there for sure, all about outward appearance.

[9 : 53] My friend, we should never come to church to give lip service to the Lord, because the Lord knows our heart and the Lord knows our motives and the Lord knows the condition of our soul.

The Lord knows what's going on in our mind. We can fool others, but we can't fool the Lord. And you know, if you're only here this evening to please yourself or to appease your conscience or to just make an appearance, if you're only here with your lips, but not here with your heart, then the Lord knows that.

And he knows that there's a problem. And your problem as it was for Israel is that your heart is divided.

You're not committed to the Lord. You're not putting the Lord first. You're not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. You're a double-minded man or woman.

And the Bible tells us that a double-minded man or woman is unstable in all their ways. And that was the problem for the Israelites. They wanted to please the Lord by coming to the Lord's house, but they also wanted to please themselves.

[11 : 07] They wanted to do their own thing. And in order to keep both parties happy, in order to keep the Lord and themselves happy, they would worship the Lord, and then afterwards they would go and worship all their other gods, and sometimes the Israelites even dragged their own idols into the temple to worship God.

They would worship God and their idols at the same time, but they weren't putting the Lord first in everything. They would bring the Lord down to their own level and make the Lord and His worship just something that was common.

And you know, we can do the same. I can do the same. We can claim that we're too busy to read our Bibles, but you know, we're never too busy to watch TV or catch up with soaps.

We can claim that we're too tired to go to church, but you know, we're never too tired to stay up late or to go out with our friends or to phone someone. We can claim that we don't have time for visiting or speaking to people about their soul, and yet we waste our time on a whole manner of things that have no eternal benefit whatsoever.

But the problem is, as it was for Israel, is that we don't put the Lord first. I feel this myself. Heart is divided. We want the best of both worlds.

[12 : 28] We want to please the Lord and we want to please ourselves. But the truth is, as the Lord is reminding us here, we've turned our back on the Lord. We're going our own way.

We're doing our own thing, and we're just giving lip service to the Lord. Now what does the Lord say about this? What does the Lord say? Look at verse five.

The Lord says, this is your problem. Why will you be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick. The whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and soars and raw wounds that are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

The Lord says to the Israelites that their rebellion and the fact that they've turned away from the Lord has left them with wounds and bruises and putrefying soars. And you know the image that we're given there, it's an image of deep lacerations to the skin, like where a sword would cut through the skin.

[13 : 35] It's like a weapon, a weapon mark, and there's the oozing of blood. That's the picture he's giving. In other words, you could say it's just a complete mess. And that's the mess he's describing.

They're in a mess and they're in desperate need of healing. They've turned from the Lord because of their sin and their rebellion. They're doing their own thing. They're going their own way.

They're doing what they want to do. They're double-minded. But you know what's remarkable and what's beautiful and what's so undeserving is that the Lord addresses their problem and our problem, not with punishment, but with a plea.

He addresses the problem with a plea. And that's what I'd like us to consider secondly. The problem, the plea. What he says in verse 18, come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Now, the verses leading up to this verse in verse 18, there's this buildup of accusations against the Israelites in which the Lord is, he's highlighting to the Israelites their problem of sin and rebellion against him.

[14:56] But as we said, what's so beautiful about this passage is that when the Lord addresses the problem of sin and rebellion, he doesn't address it with punishment.

He addresses it with a plea. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. And you know, these words, they're some of the most beautiful words in the Bible because they're words that are full of grace and full of compassion and full of love and tenderness and patience, where instead of receiving punishment for our sin and our rebellion, we're shown mercy, we're shown kindness, we're shown grace.

And it's for that very reason, because of our sin and our rebellion, it's because of our sin and rebellion that the Lord could have cast us off forever.

He could have punished us in a moment. He could have struck us down in an instant. He could have thrown us into hell without a second thought and he would have been righteous and just to do so because we deserve his wrath and curse.

We deserve the fires of hell. I deserve it. We deserve his hatred and his anger against our sin. We deserve his punishment. But that's not what we're met with here.

[16:14] We're not met with punishment. We're met with a plea. Come. Come. And you know, it's a plea and it's a personal plea to you as a sinner in need of a Savior.

Come. Come now. And this personal plea, it's been issued and given, not by Isaiah. It's not been given by me.

It's not been given by the church. It's been given by the Lord himself. This is a personal plea issued to you by the Lord himself.

The Lord is saying, come now. Let us reason together, says the Lord. The one you have sinned against, the one you've turned your back upon, the one you've acted rebelliously towards, my friend, the Lord's personal plea towards you is come.

Come. He doesn't say, stay where you are. He doesn't say, come if you're in the elect. He doesn't say, sit and just wait for something to happen in the pew.

[17:28] He doesn't say, wait for the bright light and the voice coming from heaven. No, no, no. He says, come now. Come now. And the Lord's personal plea towards you, it's come now.

The Lord doesn't say, come when you're good enough. He doesn't say, come when you're worthy enough. He doesn't say, come when you know enough. He doesn't even say, come when you've done enough.

No, no, he just says, come now. Come now. Because now is the accepted time.

And today is the day of salvation. Come now. And you know, this wouldn't be the last time that Isaiah would have to issue the Lord's plea to come because when we consider the words of this book and when you come to chapter 55, the Lord is still pleading for people to come.

The Lord says in Isaiah 55, you probably know it off by heart. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the water. She who has no money, come and buy and eat.

[18:37] Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. And the Lord is asking us, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? And why do you labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me, says, and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me. Here and your soul shall live.

And what the Lord is saying to us is that you don't need your money for what's on offer here. Put your wallet away. Put your purse away because the debt has already been paid.

Salvation is freely available to you and it's without restriction. It's an open offer. It's on the house, you could say. It's free of charge. It's this open invitation.

Call it what you will. It's yours for the taking. So come. Come now. Let us reason together, says the Lord.

[19:37] All your sins are like scarlet. They shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

But you know, this plea from the Lord for us to come to him for salvation, we have to see that it's so personal to us. And you have to see that it's so direct to you.

So direct because the Lord is saying, I don't want your religion. I don't want your outward appearances. I don't want your pomp and your ceremony. I don't want your lip service. I want your heart. I want your love. I want your commitment. I want you. And that's what we have to see in this passage. The Lord is pleading to us personally, directly. I want you. Because that's what he was saying to the Israelites.

[20 : 35] All the way up until verse 18. Look at verse 13. The Lord says, bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations, I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They've become a burden to me. I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen.

Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil from your deeds. From before my eyes. Seize to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice.

Correct oppression. Bring justice to the Fatherless. Plead the widows cause. The Lord is saying, I don't want your empty sacrifices. I don't want your meaningless offerings.

I don't want your insincere prayers. I don't want your dishonest worship. I don't want your hypocrisy. I want genuine heartfelt love and commitment to me.

[21 : 41] I want wholehearted commitment. I want you to love me with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength.

And that's why the Lord issues this loving, personal plea. Come now. Let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow. Though they're red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

And you know, I love those words. Let us reason together. Let us reason together. The Lord is saying to us, it's as if he's just coming alongside us.

So personally, so directly, so intimately. And the Lord is just saying to us, let's reason this out.

[22 : 37] Let's talk about your sin. Let's talk about your soul. Let's talk about your need of a savior.

Let's talk about Jesus. Let's talk about Jesus. But maybe for you, my friend, that's the last thing on your mind.

That's not something you want to talk about. Maybe you're just happy to come to church, happy to sit in church, maybe even happy to listen in church.

But you don't want anyone to speak to you personally. You don't want anyone to take you aside and speak to you directly. You don't want anyone to speak to you about your sin or your soul or your need of a savior.

You don't want anyone to speak to you about Jesus. Not now, not yet, not tonight. And you know, maybe there are many of you in here who are willing to talk about everything and anything else except what you need to talk about.

[23 : 44] Maybe you're willing to talk about everything and anything else except your sin and your soul and your need of a savior. But that's what you need to talk about.

And you know that. You know that you need to start talking about Jesus. And don't be afraid to talk about Jesus because the Lord is pleading with you personally to talk to him.

And for you to talk to him about Jesus. But Lord wants you to talk to him about Jesus. And he's pleading with you today. Come now. Come now, let's reason together.

Come, let's talk about your sin. Let's talk about your soul. Let's talk about your need of a savior.

Let's talk about Jesus. Let's talk about Jesus. And you know, my friend, the reason the Lord is pleading with you to talk about Jesus is because with Jesus there is a promise.

With Jesus there is a promise. And that's what I'd like us to consider lastly. The promise, the problem, the plea and the promise.

[24 : 51] The promise. Look at verse 18 again. Come now. Let us reason together says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Now, in this commentary, the Welsh theologian, Derek Thomas, he says that the start of this prophetic book is as though Isaiah is asking us, when did you last speak to God about your sin? When did you last think about God's punishment of your sin? When did you last consider the realities of heaven and hell?

Have you ever spoken to God about your sin? Have you ever thought about the punishment of your sin? Have you ever thought about the reality of heaven and hell?

Because if you continue to ignore the problem of sin, and if you continue to ignore the plea for dealing with your sin, how then will you ever experience the promise of salvation?

[26 : 00] But you know what we see in this latter part of verse 18, that's what we see. God's promise of salvation. And this word of grace, it's given to us in unforgettable terms because it's given to us using violent imagery, the imagery of murder.

Because the words scarlet and crimson, as you know, they are the colour of blood. And the image that it's implying to us is the hands of a murderer whose hands are covered in blood.

And you know, it's a fitting description because the Bible reminds us that our sin has brought death. And our sin has left our blood on our own hands.

And that if we were to stand before a judge and the blood on our hands, that would be enough evidence to convict us and leave the judge in no doubt that we are guilty.

That we've sinned, that we've brought death, that we've sinned and come short of the glory of God. Our hands are stained with scarlet and crimson blood.

[27 : 07] Our blood is on our own hands. We deserve to go to hell. Not because of anyone else's sin, but because of our own sin and our own disobedience and our own rebellion.

My friend, our problem is that our blood is on our hands and we are guilty before God. But the plea that's been issued to us is come now.

Come now, let's reason together. Let's talk about this. Let's deal with your sin. And the promise that follows the plea is though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. And with this promise, there's a promise of cleansing, a promise of forgiveness, a promise of renewal, a promise of salvation.

This is a beautiful promise that guilty, hell-deserving sinners whose hands are blood stained by their own sin, they can be washed and purified and made as white as snow.

[28 : 14] And you know that promise, it was fulfilled at the cross of Calvary. That's what Isaiah is pointing us to. For Jesus was crucified.

He was wounded and bruised and maligned, not because he was guilty. This man have done nothing amiss. But Jesus says they are condemned in our place, dying for our sin, taking our guilt and our punishment that we deserve.

And we're asking, what will wash away our sin? What will take this sin and this stain that's upon our life? What will take it away?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Is that what the hymn writer said? What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. And he says, oh precious is the flow. That makes me white as snow. No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[29 : 21] And that's the promise of Calvary, the promise of cleansing. The promise of being cleansed as white as snow. That's the promise of Calvary.

And you know it's because of the promise of Calvary that David, David could say in Psalm 51, purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than the snow. In Psalm 51 as we said, it was written as a psalm of repentance. David is confessing his sin.

He's repenting before the Lord for committing adultery and murder and lies and failing to be a righteous king and David's hands that covered in blood, not only his own blood, but the blood of another.

And David knew that he was guilty. He knew that he deserved God's punishment. David knew that he wasn't worthy of the least of God's mercy.

[30 : 17] And yet he came before God, clinging to the promise of Calvary. Clinging to the promise of being cleansed and made white as snow.

And it's because of the promise of Calvary, that covenant promise of Calvary. That's why David could say, purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. And you know, David's request, that's Sam, it's my favorite Sam, Psalm 51.

His request purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. That's a significant request because a hyssop branch it was often used to in the act of cleansing and purifying someone who had been

healed from leprosy.

Where the hyssop branch it would be dipped in blood and sprinkled upon the leper in order to grant them forgiveness and cleansing. And that's the image that David is using.

[31 : 22] He's coming before the Lord claiming that he's a leper. He's sinned and he's saying to the Lord, I'm unclean. I'm unclean. I'm unclean.

But purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Wash me in the blood of Jesus and I shall be whiter than the snow.

And as you know, looking outside today is disappearing now. But the snow, there's nothing whiter than snow. Nothing whiter than snow. There's nothing as clean and pure as snow.

There's nothing as untainted and untouched as freshly fallen snow. And the promise of the gospel is that when we come to Calvary and that when we look to Jesus and when we ask him for cleansing, we will be made as white as snow.

And I find this promise in Isaiah, it's all about Jesus. And it's been issued to us as filthy sinners.

[32 : 29] And we're being told, the Lord is saying, come now. Let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. But you know what I love about this, Warsh?

Is that it not only emphasizes our problem of sin and our plea and our promise, God's plea and promise of cleansing.

It also emphasizes that when we come to Jesus for cleansing, we will be made like him. That's the promise. The promise that John gives us in his letter.

If we confess our sin, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, only for the blood of Jesus Christ that he cleanses us from all sin.

[33 : 26] And the promise of cleansing is that we will be made as white as snow. We will be made like Jesus because that's how Jesus is described in the New Testament.

You know, when you come to the book of Revelation. John is describing his heavenly vision and he says that he sees Jesus and when he sees Jesus, he says, well, he's white as snow and he's white like wool.

Jesus is pure. He's perfect. He's he's glorious. He's sinless. He's saying. And that's the promise given to us in the gospel that when we come to Jesus for cleansing, we're not only clothed in his righteousness and made perfect in God's sight.

Yes, we'll continue to sin in this life, but John, his heavenly vision, it proves that when we see Jesus, we will be made like him.

When faith gives way to sight, we will see him and be like him even as he is. We will be pure and perfect and sinless and glorious.

[34 : 36] We will be like Jesus as white as snow, as white as snow. And this is the hope for the Christian for the person who dies in Christ.

They're made as white as snow made like Jesus. And you know, is that not what was asked of those in heaven? Remember in chapter seven of the book of Revelation, the elder asks John, who are these in white robes and where have they come from?

And John says, sir, you know, you know this. And he says, yes, these are the ones. These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation and they have washed their robes and they have made them white in the blood of the lamb.

They've made them white in the blood of the lamb. They've been cleansed and made as white as snow. My friend, with this problem of sin that we have, the Lord's plea to you tonight is come.

Come now. Come now. And his promise is that when you come, you will be washed and made white, white as snow.

[35 : 59] So will you not come? Because this is the Lord's personal plea to you tonight. Come now. Let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

May that be true for each and every one of us here this evening. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the great invitation of the Gospel.

A Gospel that reminds us that Jesus is one who is mighty to save and that he has done in us and for us, exceedingly, abundantly above all, more than we could ask or even think.

Help us, we pray, to respond. Help us to hear his voice and to come, to come now and to speak to the Lord, to speak to him about our sin and our soul and our need of a Saviour and that knowing that when we come, we will be made white, white through the blood of the Lamb.

[37 : 14] Oh, go before us, Lord, we ask. Bless us in the week that lies ahead, a week that is unknown to us, but known only to thee. Help us then to cast all our cares into thine hand, for they were the one who cares for us.

Do us good, we pray, part us with thy blessing, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.