

A white Christmas?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 December 2025

Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] Are you dreaming of a white Christmas? Are you dreaming of snow falling around you? Are you thinking! Since we have no place to go, let it snow! Let it snow! Let it snow! Let it snow!

Or perhaps those younger than me might be thinking about the words of Disney's Frozen, do you want to build a snowman? Is that what you're dreaming of this Christmas?

Even in our Christmas carols, we sometimes sing about snow, don't we? See amid the winter's snow, snow, born for us on earth below. Or in the first Noel, it was on that cold winter's night that was so deep. Or in the bleak midwinter, snow had fallen snow upon snow. We love the idea of a white Christmas, Christmas. But the chances of a white Christmas, particularly here in Brighton, seem very slim to me. The most likely substance we'll see falling from the sky is that wet sort of kind, the wet and clear sort of kind that we see, the rain. And the chances of Bethlehem being full of snow on the night that Jesus was born, I think are also pretty slim as well, despite what our carols may have us believe. However, I want to tell us this morning that having a white Christmas isn't completely impossible for us. But I think we need to think less about the snow falling from the ground and more about something deeper. And this is where Isaiah 1 helps us. The context of this passage, we've read some of it this morning, it helps us to see that things weren't very white among God's people in Jerusalem, where the prophet Isaiah is speaking. But when I say white, don't think about snow. White in terms of purity. White snow is a way we can illustrate the purity of the Lord. Because when we see the pure white of snow, we suddenly see that things that we thought were white don't look very white. So growing up at home, we had a West Highland Terrier who we thought was really very white, except from when snow fell and didn't look quite as clean and white and pure as we thought. And snow lying on the ground in Brighton as it does from time to time, looks very lovely and clean and pure and white, but very, very quickly becomes very dirty looking.

[3:11] As we traipse our muddy shoes through it, that lovely, freshly laid white snow doesn't last very long.

And when faced with the complete purity, white hot purity of God, we find ourselves a bit like this dog or something else that we thought was white.

We thought we were clean. And yet actually we're pretty dirty. A bit like Joshua in that passage that David took us to earlier.

Because the problem is with our hearts, meaning not the pumping thing in our body, but our cool being and character. It's not as holy, we're not as good as we thought. In fact, if you read a few chapters on in Isaiah chapter 6, you'd see Isaiah faced with a pure white holiness of God and he falls down on the ground and he says, woe is me. I am unclean before you. And I live among a people who are unclean. And we see the uncleanness pointed out to the people of God in this chapter.

Verse 5 of chapter 1 says this, It's a bit of a gross image.

[5:05] Saying your whole body is basically a big open wound. Far from white purity, it's red blood is dripping from you.

There is not much health in the city. And it's to do with what we read in verse 4, they've forsaken the Lord. They've said no to God's ways and yes to their own sinful hearts.

And the issue with them is diagnosed by the Lord in verse 16. Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight.

Stop doing wrong. It says you're unclean. And so to make yourselves clean, you need to learn to do what is right, verse 17 says.

Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow. The issue is their hearts.

[6:11] Their character. They're not interested in seeking justice for the most vulnerable in their society as the Lord would have them do.

Not seeking to love others as he has loved them. And we find very quickly this morning, this passage is rather bleak. Perfect for a bleak midwinter's day in January, you're probably thinking. Why bring this before us on a dark December day? But if we long for a white Christmas, the good news is the answer is found in this passage.

If our friends long for a white Christmas, we can tell them, you can have one. But not quite what you're imagining.

It's even better. Because what we see when we get to verse 18 is a gracious invitation to people stained with sin so that they can enjoy God's blessing.

[7:28] Let's think firstly about the gracious invitation. What's the gracious invitation? It's there at the beginning of verse 18. Come. This is the Lord speaking.

Come. Now let us settle the matter. The Lord God who is detesting their evil behavior, who could just say to them, depart from me, away from me.

I don't want to know you. Who could say, I've had enough. But no, he says, come. It's nice to be invited to places over Christmas, isn't it?

Nice to be invited to see family or friends over this season. But this invitation here is an even better invitation.

From the Lord, the judge of sin, who could say, go away from me. He actually says, come. And the language used here in this verse is a legal language, an invitation to stand on trial in a court.

[8:32] It's an opportunity for justice to be done against these people who are practicing injustice. And perhaps, though it's very gracious of the Lord to say, come, you would probably imagine in that court scene that is being set up for us, you would probably be imagining it's just a formal process to give these people the just punishment they deserve.

Nonetheless, I think it is a very gracious invitation, and we'll see that more as we go through. Gracious that God, who abhors evil, would even consider inviting them to come anywhere near him. And we see just how gracious it is as we continue through verse 18, because we see it's a gracious invitation to people stained with sin to have this sin stain removed.

Verse 18, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Scarlet and crimson were red dyes.

Virtually impossible to get out of your clothes. Not even this stuff, vanished stain remover, could deal with them. What's more, we see not only scarlet and crimson in this passage, but literally in verse 15, Isaiah says, Your hands are full of blood.

[10:17] Blood, scarlet, crimson, red, dirty. stuff is going on for their rejection of the Lord and his ways.

Deep red stains of their own making. And as we read through these verses, we should stop and consider ourselves.

And this world that we live in. As Isaiah said, I am unclean and I live among a people of unclean lips. The effect of sin stains are seen right across this world, aren't they?

The effect of sin stains are seen throughout the history of this world. They're seen all around us, in this place that we live in.

And we see them inside ourselves, if we're thinking very carefully. Every bitter thought that we've had, every evil deed we have done, every harsh word we have said, is a stain, another stain on us, before the Lord, who is completely white in his purity.

[11:47] We're reminded of that broken object that's gone into the bin because of our angry outbursts. We feel the shame when we're reminded of something we have done in the past.

We lament the broken family relationships that make Christmas time so hard. Sin stains are all around us.

And whatever we do, they cannot be rubbed out. We can move on from our past sins in different ways. They say time heals, hurts, and it does to some degree.

We can forgive and forget or at least try and forget. But we still can't undo. We still can't press the rewind button.

We wish we could. And so all of us need to hear this gracious invitation to people stained with sin. It's not just for Isaiah's day.

[12:57] And see how gracious it is. Let me read part of verse 18 to you again. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

See, vanished stain remover can't do it. But there's something far greater and far stronger that can. Because the Holy Lord God Almighty is inviting them to come to this court where you'd imagine they would be sentenced to some harsh punishment and yet he's saying there's an invitation to have this sin stain removed.

The deepest scarlet and crimson stain can be turned to white, pure white, like freshly laid snow. and white, like the whitest of sheep's wool. The songs encourage us to dream of a white Christmas. This is where we can find a white Christmas. No longer does it need to be a fantasy, a song, a dream, it's a reality if we choose to come before the Lord.

[14:23] Because God invites sinful people to have their stains gone, removed. But there's a condition that the Lord lays out here, verse 19.

If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land, but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

If you're willing and obedient, willing to hear God's call to you to repent, that's that turnaround word from your evil deeds, to turn back to following him.

A deliberate choice on our part, to be willing and obedient. And if you do, you may enjoy God's blessing.

And that should remind them of some verses he's spoken to before. The blessing here is you will eat good things of the land.

[15:33] It should be a reminder to them of what he has spoken to them in the past. I'm just going to read some verses from Deuteronomy chapter 30. You may like to turn it up.

It's important to see this to help us to really understand what Isaiah is saying, reminding the people of. Deuteronomy chapter 30. Verse 15.

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him and to keep his commands, decrees and laws. Then you will live and increase and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you're entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you're not obedient and if you're drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

[16:57] Now choose life so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God. Listen to his voice, hold fast to him for the Lord is your life and he will give you many years in the land he swore to you to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God was giving his people land in fulfillment of promises given to those people in the past, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And so he says, follow me, be obedient to me, choose me, I am your life, but choose to go away from me, choose to not follow my rules, choose to bow down to other gods, and you're not going to live long in this land.

And the witnesses before them is the heavens and the earth. And then you get to Isaiah one land where we are today, and a court's been set and those witnesses, the heavens and the earth, can share that they're not being obedient to the Lord as they should.

Even though we do see in Isaiah one, and we read a little bit of it earlier, that they do try and come before the Lord. They do try and worship him.

And back in Isaiah one, verse 12, when you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, is trampling of my courts. Stop bringing meaningless offerings, your incense is detestable to me, new moon, sabbaths, convocations, I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.

[18:43] They're meeting before the Lord, they're offering sacrifices before the Lord. They're celebrating festivals before the Lord, but the Lord says in verse 14, I'm weary of this.

And their prayer meetings, verse 15, he's not loving. Verse 15, when you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you. Even when you offer many prayers, I'm not listening.

Because outside of the worship of God, they do not want to know him. It's become meaningless ritual. And that's a little warning to us when we read this passage.

And we're gathering in ways like this, and we're gathering at extra times over the course of these next few weeks to celebrate Christmas. I think the Lord would have us read these and think, just check your own hearts in this.

Are you coming just because you love all the twinkly lights and singing the carols you've sung for years? Or are you coming because you really do want to give thanks to the Lord for the good gift of his son?

[20:01] It's a call to search our own hearts as we come to worship. In the whole book of Isaiah, it's a massive book.

It's split into two parts really. One to thirty-nine is pre-exile, as in the Lord's people are in the land that the Lord has given them.

But despite warning after warning that you read throughout chapters one to thirty-nine, the people don't change. And in light of those words we read from Deuteronomy thirty, they do not get to stay in the land.

They end up in exile in a foreign land. But God still is very gracious and still wants them to come back to him.

He's not going to break his covenant promises with them. And so once their exile is done and they return to the land, in Isaiah chapter forty, you could read wonderful words of tender comfort.

[21:16] Comfort, comfort my people. people. But if you read very carefully through the rest of Isaiah, they still don't change.

But all the way through, the whole big book is a big book of Isaiah. There were so many glimmers of hope. Verse eighteen to twenty here, one of those glimmers of hope.

there's another glimmer of hope. I'm in chapter seven, where I'm just going to take us to very quickly. Isaiah chapter seven, verse fourteen.

The context is the king of God's people at the time, Ahaz, he's been asked to ask the Lord for a sign, another sign of God's grace.

Ask me for a sign, you can have one. But instead he wants to make a deal with a wicked king instead of look to the Lord.

[22:25] the Lord. And yet despite that, the Lord still says, chapter seven, verse fourteen, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and he will be called Emmanuel.

The sign, an impossible act of creation in a virgin's womb which will result in the birth of Emmanuel. meaning God with us. And I wonder, does that remind you of anyone? It should remind us of that first Christmas.

As Mary and Joseph have a boy who they are told is Emmanuel, God with us. God's come to be with us.

God come to be with people who have no spiritual health, whose sins stain like crimson and scarlet. God's hearts. And in Emmanuel, we see the solution that God is providing for us.

[23:45] It's not in vanished stain remover. It's in Emmanuel. God come to be with us.

And as you read through the Gospels, you see that Emmanuel, God with us, chose to be Emmanuel, God come to die for us.

God come to take on our sin. He who had no sin of his own took on our sin. And he shed his red, crimson blood to wash away the red, crimson, scarlet stains of sin that we have.

In order that we might be cleansed as white as snow. And that is incredible grace from the Lord God Almighty. He doesn't have to say come.

He could say go away. But no, he says come and he says I'm even going to come and be with you. And I'm going to die for you. That's the Gospel story that we're celebrating this Christmas.

[24:56] That's how we can have a white Christmas. And so I should ask, is that where your heart is at this morning?

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing blood? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? And just one more thing.

One of the major ways we see God's people had failed is that they were not looking after the poorest and most vulnerable amongst them.

Israel as a nation themselves, they were the smallest of the nations. Felt like outsiders at times, but God chose to have mercy on them, chose to show his grace and love on them, chose to give them so many precious promises.

But they failed to do that for people within their own midst. James chapter 1 in the New Testament says religion that God, our God, our Father accepts as pure and faultless as this, to look after the orphans and widows, to look after those who are outsiders.

[26:24] who are vulnerable and helpless, look after them in their distress and keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. They failed to do this in Isaiah 1.

Are we seeking to do this? Seeking to show love even to the outsiders? Seeking to show love to those amongst us who might be new, might be different from us?

Because we've been shown incredible, generous love seen in Jesus Emmanuel. It starts here, it ought to go out of here, but it starts here together as God's people, knowing that God is with us even now.

God is alongside us even now. God is still offering us his wonderful grace. Emmanuel. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much. In such a dark chapter really, that we see that a white Christmas, a white life is possible as we come to you stained with red, scarlet, crimson sins.

[27:55] And we come to you, the God who can wash our sins whiter than snow. And Father, we thank you that the Lord Jesus was willing to provide the solution for that.

Emmanuel, God with us, thank you so much that we're celebrating his birth. we're also celebrating what he grew up to do in shedding his blood so we can know your incredible grace.

Father, fill our hearts with praise to you this Christmas for this glorious, glorious act of salvation.

And help us to be people that are obedient to you, people who are looking out for the outsiders, the vulnerable, the poor, the lost.

Help us to welcome people in our midst over these next few weeks, we pray. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Over to David.