

A rebellious nation

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[0 : 00] Well, yesterday I went to a wedding, the first wedding I've been to since my own wedding to Becky a few weeks ago.

! And I saw the wedding in a whole new light. I haven't been to many weddings in the past, but going to a wedding when you've previously got married, you kind of appreciate it in different ways. You appreciate the stress and the money and the time and the planning that has gone into making this happen. And so, yeah, I appreciated it so much more.

And this evening, as we look at this passage, just for a few minutes, I hope that as we look at it, we'll appreciate more the work that God has done for us.

The work that God has done for us, even though we are a bit like these people that God speaks about, these sinful and rebellious people.

[1 : 09] But we see, even in this passage, the great work that God has done for us, that we'll be visibly reminded of as we take communion this evening.

And so what happens in this passage? Well, kind of, first of all, God calls the heavens and the earth as witnesses against his people.

He's kind of calling them to a court because they have done wrong. And so, verse 2, hear me, you heavens, listen, earth. His creation is being called to hear the charge that God is making against his people.

For the Lord has spoken, I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The problem is, the accusation is that God's people, that he has lovingly chosen and kind of, as he says, brought up, they've rebelled against him.

They've turned their back on him. And he then goes on to talk about animals.

[2 : 35] So he talks about an ox and a donkey. They know who their master is. They know where to turn to for safety, for food, for security.

So the ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger. But for Israel, he says, Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. It's the Lord who they can turn to. For peace, security. To know that he is the one who loves them, who provides for them, who's the father looking after them.

But they've rebelled against God. They've turned their backs on him.

Verse 4 says that. They've turned their backs on him. Or literally, they've estranged themselves backwards.

[3 : 44] They are being like a rebellious teenager. Parents have put so much love in raising their children, and their children go off against their parents, saying, No, I'm not going your way.

I'm going my way. Doing my thing. Don't want to listen to you anymore. That's what God's children are doing. It brings sadness to parents, I'm sure, when that happens.

God is not pleased with his people. The Lord has been good and kind to his people and faithful to them.

But they're wandering away from him. And yet, the people, they were kind of congratulating themselves on their religious behavior.

Maybe they didn't really see what was wrong. But God is showing them here through the prophet Isaiah. So, from verse 11, really, that the multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me?

[4 : 58] They're offering the sacrifices, offering the right animal at the right time and in the right way. But God says, I've had more than enough of that.

I have no pleasure in any of that. Stop bringing your meaningless offerings. They're detestable to me. They celebrate the festivals.

At the right times, in the right ways. But God says, I hate it with all my being. They've become burdensome to me. I'm weary of them. When you pray, I hide my eyes from you.

I'm not listening. Because their hearts are not right with God. They're rebellious people. It's all become rather abhorrent to God.

It would be like us this evening, singing praise to God with mouths wide open, completely in tune. But with lives that don't love God.

[6 : 05] They don't want to praise Him. God finds that sad. He's angry. And this evening, we're here to join together in this Lord's Supper and the bread and the wine.

But maybe even this evening, for some of us, our hearts aren't really in it. Maybe we're here because we feel we have to be.

Because God's going to be pleased with us if we do this. Not remembering. We're like these rebellious people. We're sinful.

We're sinful. And in need of our Saviour's work. However we've come this evening, know that God is really very merciful.

And we see that in this passage. So God, first of all, so particularly want us to look at verse 16 to 20.

[7 : 15] God, first of all, lays out His kind of requirements for these rebellious people. He says to them, down in verse 16, He says to them to wash.

Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. It's good to wash, isn't it?

I'm sure we all learn about how long we should wash our hands during COVID. That 20 seconds. Hot, soapy water. Our hands get mucky.

They can spread infections. It's good to wash. It's good for me to go and shower after I've had a run because I'm all sweaty. It's good to wash. And for these people.

For God's people. They're dirty. Notice that in verse 5. Your whole head is injured. Your whole heart is afflicted because of their rebellion.

[8 : 18] From the sole of your foot to the top of your head, there's no soundness. Only wounds and bruises and open sores. They're not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. You need to come and wash.

Wash because you're dirty in my sight. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. He says, stop. He says, wash.

He says, stop. Stop doing wrong. Come back to me. Come back to me and my ways. And he says to them, learn.

Learn to do right. Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow. Learn to care about what God cares about.

God cares about those who are oppressed and fatherless and widows. All they're caring about is their religious performance before God. They're selfish.

[9 : 27] God wants them to remember others. Remember his ways. But can we really imagine such rebellious people actually changing, actually washing, actually stopping doing wrong and learning to do what is right?

Can we imagine that? Maybe we have people that we know and we think, could they ever turn to Christ? Could they ever be here at a communion service one day?

It's like trying to get a leopard to change its spots. It's impossible. But God has an invitation.

God has an invitation to his rebellious and sinful people to come. To come. To come. Verse 18. Come now.

Let us settle the matter. It's kind of back to this kind of courtroom language. Come now. Let's hear the verdict. Let's get this all settled.

[10 : 36] God is going to surprise them. Instead of charging them with saying, you're guilty and here's your punishment.

He says something that I think is really extraordinary. He says, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be white like wool.

He says this, your sin, it causes a stain. There's some blood on there.

That causes a stain, doesn't it? I remember being really sad just a few years ago having to throw out an old t-shirt because it had a stain on it. And I tried time and time again with different stain remover.

It just disappeared a bit, but it didn't go away. It's annoying. And our sin before God is like that stain. [11:42] It just won't go away. We can't go to the shops and buy a sin stain remover. And if we could, it would be a complete con. Because we can't remove our sin, can we?

They're stains of deepest dye. You know what God says? Though your sins are like scarlet, red. Though they are red as crimson, they can be white.

They can be white. White like snow and white like wool. Naturally, beautifully white. Here's some snow.

Here's some wool. Your sin. Though it causes a stain in front of me. Though I hate your sin. I can wash it like this.

I do quite like it when it snows. It's pretty wonderful. Unless, as I did back in December, get your car stuck in it.

[12:54] But I do love snow. Love that you can throw snowballs at people. And it seems to be perfectly fine. Love that you can build snowmen, even as grown adults.

But the moment the snow comes and it looks so beautiful and white, go out in it with my dirty shoes and make a mess all over it.

I stain the snow. We do, don't we? We make it dirty. It's so beautiful, so white, so incredible. And we make it dirty. We used to have a white dog.

And we thought he was very white until it snowed and he looked the grossest yellow color. Not white at all. And for us, before God, it's like he's looking down on a beautiful piece of snow and then we're there and we're just staining it.

That's what our sins are like before God. But his answer is that though your sins are like scarlet, they can be white as snow.

[14:04] Though they are red as crimson, they shall be white like wool. But we can't do that.

But we can respond to what God is offering here. He says in 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. We can respond by being willing and obedient.

Willing for God to wash us clean. And it very much is God who washes us.

Who cleanses us from our sin. So just a few pages forward in Isaiah.

[15:07] In Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14. We know this verse well. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. And we'll call him Emmanuel. Emmanuel. And we know, don't we, that in the New Testament, there is a virgin who conceives and gives birth to a son. Emmanuel, God with us. Given the name Jesus. Jesus. Who will save his people from their sins. And how has Jesus saved his people from their sins?

It's by doing what we're going to remember today. As we take the Lord's Supper. By his body hanging on the cross. For us in our place.

Though we are sinful. Though our sins are like scarlet. Though they are red as crimson. Though they stain. And God is angry with sin. And Jesus would die in our place.

[16:18] And he would shed his blood. His red, crimson, scarlet blood. To wash us in. Away. The Bible says without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

And Jesus has done that for us. And just in case you're in any doubt. I haven't got the reference down. But in Revelation.

There's a verse. Maybe we'll find it later. Exactly which chapter and verse it is. It says, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

It's the Lord Jesus. The Lamb of God. Who takes away our sin. And so if we are willing and obedient.

It says here, you will eat the good things of the land. You can come, have your sins washed white as snow. Enjoy the blessings of knowing God.

[17:22] Of being his people. But. Can also respond. To this by resisting. And rebelling.

If you refuse to listen. You'll be devoured by the sword. God is very clear in his warning. But he's very gracious. To rebellious people.

We can. Though our sins are like scarlet. We can know them. Being as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson. They can be white like wool. And so this evening.

As we kind of. Remembered again. Sin. And its seriousness. And as we come to.
This. The Lord's Supper. Hopefully we can appreciate. Once again. What our Savior has done for
us. At the cross.

[18 : 27] Hopefully we can appreciate again. The cleansing. That we have. And so maybe just. It
would be good.

To in a moment. Just pause. And be quiet. Before we sing. Another song. Because this evening.
We have an opportunity. Don't we. To. Gaze at our Lord Jesus.
Our Savior. Who has done. All that is needed. For our sins. To be. Cleansed. Let's pause.
And be quiet. Respond to God. In our hearts. And then we'll sing. Let's go.