

Isaiah and the gospel - sin

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[0:00] I want to ask, to start off, what is the problem with the world? Is it government? So if we got the right government, the problems would disappear.

Is it the system? I don't know which system that brings to mind, the benefit system, the establishment system. If we got that right, would all the problems disappear? Or is the problem with the world the big corporations? So there's this Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple have got these huge, great systems.

If we could sort that out, would the problems go away? Is it a problem that there are left-wing liberals? If we could sort them out, everything would be right?

Or sort out the right-wing conservatives? Pardon me for this question. It's a question people would say. Is it immigrants? If we could sort out immigration, would all the problems go away? None of those is what the Bible says.

[1:01] The Bible says that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The Bible says that the problem with this world is moral and spiritual, personal failure.

It is said, and I haven't got a citation for this, that this was the subject of correspondence in the Times newspaper, the Times of London newspaper.

The subject was what is wrong with the world? And it is said that the writer, G.K. Chesterton, who wrote the Father Brown stories, incidentally, wrote this very short letter to the Times on this subject. Dear Sir, I am. Yours sincerely, G.K. Chesterton. What's the problem with the world? Dear Sir, I am. And I want us to talk and think this morning about this moral and personal failure, which the Bible has a word for.

It has a number of words, but let's take this one, sin. Let's think this morning about sin. What is sin? I'm going to introduce it. I'm going to talk about the revelation of sin.

[2:16] In other words, what is it? I'm going to talk about application, some two particular examples. I'm going to talk about the remedy for sin, what God can do about it, the revelation of it, two particular applications, and the remedy for sin.

And having spent however long we spend this morning, we'll just scratch the surface of this subject. So let's introduce it. Sin is the deep moral and spiritual failure of human beings.

So we're not talking about the vegetable world or ecology. We're saying it's us, human beings.

And this subject is of absolutely fundamental importance for the Christian gospel. It is a dismal subject. There's nothing cheering about the subject of sin.

But it's like any sort of diagnosis. If you don't get to the bottom of the problem, you can't solve it. And if we don't get to the bottom of this problem of sin, we will never have what the Bible says is such a wonderful thing, the joy of sins forgiven.

[3:33] A gospel that does not warn sinners of God's wrath against sin is no gospel at all.

Now, what is sin? I'll say a number of things. It's a profound mystery. It's a profound mystery. We're not going to get to the bottom of this because it is so complex.

If you think what we're going to be talking about, we're going to talk about what is almost an unbearable contradiction between the fact that each of us is a human being made in the image of God.

We're made in the image of God. That's what we are. And what sin does is say that each human being resists, rebels, turns away, denies, contradicts God.

And for us to sit as we are this morning, being beings in such a tension, everything about us is made in the image of God and yet sin makes every thought, every atom resist that whole thing. [4:44] How can that possibly be? We do it every day with ease, don't we? And if you think I'm going to explain sin this morning, never when people try to explain sin, they might say, well, the explanation is to do with actually society.

If we trace through the sociology, we will explain sin. Or psychology, we can say, oh, is this particular psychological thing? Or it's to do with nature or nurture or something, an upbringing. Or it's somebody else's fault or it's the system's fault. The thing to do with sin is not to explain it, but to confess it. That's the truest explanation you'll get from sin when you've traced it all the way through.

The thing you come down to is, God have mercy on me, a sinner. That's where it comes to. If it doesn't come to there, you haven't got to it. God have mercy on me, a sinner. There's multiple layers and descriptions and images of sin. So the writing gets small because there's so much to say. Sin is described as a sickness or an infection or blindness or deafness or lameness or corruption or deadness or twistedness or disobedience or overstepping boundaries or fundamental irreverence.

[6:19] All of those things are sin. What sin is. Sin can be outward acts. It can be inward thoughts. It can be the way you perceive things and the motivation for why you do things.

There are open sins and there are secret sins. There's a song that says, wonder of all wonders. Through your death for me, my open sins, my secret sins can all forgiven be. Sin goes right to the heart of what it is to be a human being in this time of human existence. Sin has a horizontal dimension, a sort of social dimension because God has given us neighbors and he said, love your neighbor as yourself. And we fail in that department. Sin has a vertical dimension. That's the theology of it. Because we are in relation to God, our caring, giving creator.

[7:19] And even, you know, the fact that we are not conscious of that or not too bothered about that is part of our sin. Because that's one of the relationships we're in. We're in a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with our neighbors.

And we fail in both those. And Jesus said, what are you supposed to do? You're supposed to love God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. And your neighbor is yourself. And sin doesn't do that.

You can think of sin in various ways. The Lutherans think of sin as the human being curved in on itself. So instead of our thoughts going upwards to God, we go in on ourselves. And you might find that that's how your sinful thought life goes. As you curve in on yourself and you think about yourself. And yourself becomes the main thing. You can think of sin legally in terms of laws. A lack of submission to the law of the holy God. You can think of sin in terms of worship.

[8:18] It's a worship of created things instead of the creator. That's what Paul says at the beginning of Romans. Sin affects all cultures, all ages, historical and chronological.

All social groups, though in different ways. Sin manifests itself in different ways and different groups. In the Bible, the particular grouping that it will think of is the Jew and the non-Jew. Because that was the big division between the human race, Jew and non-Jew. And the Bible will be at pains to say Jew and non-Jew have both sinned. Both fallen short of the glory of God. Since our first parents. I put parents in bracket because we had, presumably there was a first human couple. I think anybody would presume that. Adam and Eve. But it's Adam's sin that is the key to this.

Ever since then, if you are a human, you're a sinner. If you're a human, you're a sinner. Even if you're in your mother's womb. If you're human, you're a sinner.

[9:27] And the humiliation of that cannot be avoided. And there are no exceptions to it. Every human being since Adam knows guilt.

Knows a bad conscience. Knows the humiliation of that. Knows what it is to have to say, I'm sorry, I was wrong. The only exception was Jesus.

And he died as if he were a sinner. So that we sinners could be set free. It's a humiliating truth about our race.

So that introduces us to it. So let me now talk about the revelation of sin. Without God's revelation, we have only a very sketchy idea of what sin is.

And that's part of our problem. That we don't have that awareness. Sin actually affects our perception. So people currently will have an awareness of some moral and spiritual defects in society and in people.

[10:33] So the current sins that people would recognize, I would say, is discrimination. Some people would say, well, being liberal is, depending on where you are politically.

Or damaging the planet by eating meat or burning coal. And people say, well, that's clearly ethically wrong.

And then another catch-all phrase is extremism. We all know that extremism is wrong. Well, I'm still to be convinced. I think Christians all ought to be extreme, shouldn't they?

In their love for God. In their faith in Jesus Christ. But anyway, extremism. That's what our society thinks sin is. In days past, people used to think having sex before marriage was sinful.

Our culture now doesn't think that's a problem at all. And this means that in society generally, the perception is that there are a few bad people whom we can point the finger at.

[11:37] But everybody else is okay. That's the sort of way it works, isn't it? And that means that people will say, well, I'm not as bad as him.

You know, you think of a few wicked people. And you can sort of point the finger at them. And say, well, by comparison, I'm fine. I'm not as bad as him or her or them.

And even, and this is such an unperceptive thing to say. People in this building have said this to me. I've never sinned. I don't know how you could know yourself so little as to think you've never sinned. And what that is, is a quiet, but in God's sight, an intolerable human pride. Do you honestly think you've never sinned?

God being who he is, the way you've related to people, is your conscience so dull that you could honestly say, I've never sinned.

[12:40] Well, people say that, and there you go. Now, sin needs revealing. And it's the work of the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin.

And when the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, he leads them to the Savior. And you won't become a Christian without that process. If you think you've become a Christian and you haven't been through that process, you haven't become a Christian.

A Christian is somebody whom the Holy Spirit convinces, you're a sinner. And the person says, you're right, I am. I need Jesus.

And the Holy Spirit leads the person to Jesus. Jesus. That's his work to do that. Jesus saves sinners. So if you're not a sinner, he's no help to you at all, is he?

Satan has a role in sin. He, on the other hand, accuses of sin. And he leads away from hope and forgiveness. So those two spiritual sides of this ought to be distinguished.

[13:50] The Holy Spirit convicts of sin to lead people to the Savior and take that burden away. And Satan accuses of sin and doesn't tell you about the Savior at all. It just makes you feel bad and gloomy and depressed and offers you no hope.

Those two things are different ministries. Now then, God reveals sin to people. It needs revealing. Turn to Isaiah chapter 1, if you would.

And here's an example of God reasoning with people, talking to people to show them their sin. And I just want to pick out a few things from this, from Isaiah chapter 1.

And he's speaking to a specific group of people in a specific historical situation. But I think there's enough generality about it to say that although we're not in exactly that same situation, we can learn and we can have the spotlight on us to show us where we're sinful.

Search me, O God, and try my heart and see if there's any wicked way in me. So, Isaiah chapter 1, verse 2, God appeals to heaven and earth in the sort of seriousness of this discourse.

[15:08] Look, think about this. Listen to this. The Lord has spoken. And the first thing that he mentions is, I reared children and brought them up, but they've rebelled against me.

I reared children and brought them up, but they've rebelled against me. And he's talking about a particular form of ingratitude, isn't he? I remember, still with pain, actually my gran saying to me after my birthday, when I turned up my nose at some present that some loving relative had given me, she said, it's sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child.

And I've felt ashamed of that ever since. But here, God is saying to these people, I've treated you as children, and you have not acknowledged this at all.

You've rebelled against me. You spat back in my face after all the kindness I've given to you. Now, we are not nowadays in the time when God has a particular nation that he supervises politically and so on and so on.

But we are in a similar position because of all that God has given us. I deliberately chose that song to begin now. Thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices.

[16:32] Because of all who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices, who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love. So the first thing is that God has given us so much, and sin has the character of ingratitude.

All you can find to say about your situation is to moan. You display your ingratitude to God, who has blessed you in so many ways.

There's the rebellion of children. I reared up children, and they've rebelled against me. And rebellion is at the heart, again, of what it is, what sin is. It is saying, God is saying, I made you.

I have blessed you. I have authority over you. That's the way it is. And the human heart says, No, you don't.

I'll take your gifts, but I'll choose myself who's the authority over my life. I've reared up children, but they've rebelled against me.

[17:40] And then he goes on to say, The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger. So these are just stupid animals. They know, change the metaphor, which side their bread's buttered on.

They know where they get food. They know where they get food. They know who's looking after them. He says, But you people, Israel, does not know.

My people do not understand. They don't click this very simple, basic truth that the God who has made them looks after them. And if they're rebelling against him, they're cutting off their own supply of benefits.

It's just a stupid thing. Even animals know where you get fed. But human beings, and this goes, it's Israel, but I don't think we're any different, are stupid and dense about these spiritual facts.

And then he goes on in verse 4 to talk about guilt. Our sinful nation, people loaded with guilt. And it gives the idea of a burden, something that weighs on you.

[18:53] John Bunyan appreciated that very clearly in Pilgrim's Progress, because the pilgrim had a burden of sin, a big weight on him. And sin does that.

Guilt is a burden, isn't it? You've felt guilty for things that you've said and things that you've done until the time that you can find forgiveness, until you can say to the person, sorry, I was out of order.

And they say, that's okay. You have a burden on you, don't you? I know different consciences probably work differently on this, but I think we all know what a burden of guilt is. And then he talks about, verse 4, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption.

And he's moving into the sort of lifestyle, patterns of life. What do these people do? They do evil. What is their method of operation?

Corruption. Verse 4, they have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One and turned their backs on him.

[20:02] So it's three times it's describing what it is to have God, as it were, overlooking our lives, but to deliberately turn in the opposite direction, to forsake the Lord, to spurn the Holy One and turn your back on him.

That's what sin is, to turn our backs on God. verse 10, verse 10, puts his speech, his word, into the equation.

Verse 10 says, hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. And, there's some other places in Isaiah, where turning, spurning the Lord, forsaking him, is linked with turning from what he says.

And, although, verse 4 doesn't make that connection, it's there in verse 10. And, it is a general connection, that the way you spurn the Lord is to spurn what he says.

Jesus put it that way, didn't it? who is ashamed of me and my words in this wicked generation, I'll be ashamed of him. So, the God of the Bible and what he says go together.

[21:31] So, just taking a look at the rest of the chapter, verses 10 to 15, the particularity of this situation, they all go to church, they all go, they all turn up, they all pray, but it's actually the temple, isn't it?

They all go along, it says, they trample his courts, verse 12, they bring lots of offerings, so there's no shortage of religion. New moon, Sabbath, convocations, verse 13, verse 14, new moon festivals, appointed feasts, verse 15, they spread out their hands in prayer, verse 15, halfway through, they offer many prayers and sin here has got a sort of complication to it.

It isn't that they don't come along religiously, but they seem to manage to combine apparently sincere religious rights with relational wrongs.

Because God says, your problem is, verse 15, your hands are full of blood. take your evil deeds out of my sight, stop doing wrong, learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

He says, because this is how deceptive sin is, they think they're fine, yeah, we go along every week to church, we pray, but he says, but God's saying, you haven't spotted how contradictory you are.

[23:08] You manage to think you're right with God, but with your neighbour, you don't care two hoots about them. Your relational, this is the relational side of it, has all gone wrong.

They have sacrifices, attendances, holy days, feasts, prayers, and they seem to combine that with selfishness, and cruelty, and hard heartedness, particularly to do with people in need.

And God says, you've got it all wrong. You've got it all wrong. And so in verse 18, God says, come, let us reason together. Let's not sweep this under the carpet, let's not pretend it doesn't exist.

Let's talk about your sin, and what can be done about it. Would you like to hear what God says about your sin, and what can be done about it?

Or are you even now thinking, well, I'm not a sinner. This is not to do with me. Please don't think that. Come, let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

[24:16] Something can be done. God can do it. And we'll find out a bit more about that in a moment. So I'm saying this is spoken to a very specific situation.

It's ancient, the ancient days of ancient Israel. But we in the 21st century in the UK, whether we're church people or not church people, there are real similarities between our situation and theirs.

And the sin that we confess is very similar to this. Lord, I've been ungrateful. Lord, I've been inconsistent. Lord, I've said one thing and done another. Lord, I have been selfish, and I haven't thought about other people as I should.

the revelation of sin. Secondly, application of sin. Now, there's two particular pieces of the Bible, and those of you who are hot on Bible knowledge will know this.

There are two particular pieces of Isaiah that are quoted in the New Testament. So I thought we would have a quick look at those. And the first is Isaiah 59. Isaiah 59. So if you're able to find a place in the Bible, please do so.

[25:26] Now, this part of Isaiah is a bit we haven't yet dealt with in any sort of depth. It's different to the other parts, in that this seems to, well, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's read it. Isaiah 59, verse 1. Isaiah 59, verse 1. Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

But your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt, your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

No one calls for justice. No one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies. They conceive trouble and give birth to evil.

They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die when one is broken and an adder is hatched. Their cobwebs are useless for clothing.

[26:34] They cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds. An act of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin. They are swift to shed innocent blood.

Their thoughts are evil thoughts. Ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know. There is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked paths.

No one who walks in them will know peace. So justice is far from us. Righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness. And it is a very stark description of sin.

And that is the one that Paul picks up in, just to keep one finger, don't lose that place. Romans chapter 3. Excuse me. He picks that up from that chapter in Romans chapter 3, 9 to 18.

Where he says, Shall we conclude? Then are we any better?

[27:39] I think he's probably thinking we Jews. Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one.

There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away. All together have become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Ruin and misery mark their ways.

And the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. And you notice he's quoting. It's not all a quote from Isaiah 59, but some of it is.

And it's a very, very, very stark description of sin. And it's probably worth pausing to think about this.

[28:37] Is he actually saying, when he says, Their throats are open graves. There is no one who does good. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Is he actually saying that every single person is a murderer who does not fear God?

Is that what he's saying? I don't think he means to say that. Because by God's grace, most of us are held back from murder.

Even if we think at some point, I could strangle you. In God's grace, it's theologically called his common grace, his general grace.

Most of us are prevented from getting to that actual point, aren't we? So Paul is using a sort of extreme language. And the point he's making is, let's go back, what have I put, that Isaiah, in his part, is sort of analysing, speaking to the exiles in Babylon, why are we in Babylon?

Because of our sin. When we return geographically, when God brings us back into the land, how much will have changed spiritually?

[29:58] Because we'll be in a different location. But that deep sin thing, actually, that's the problem. And the depth and extremity of that, I think is the reason, I think is the reason, why such extreme language is used.

Even though you never actually commit murder, there's hatred in the human heart. That's the sort of thing he's saying. The deep problem of the sinful heart remains.

And I think that's where Paul is in chapter 3 of Romans. He's talking about the sinfulness of sin.

Even if you are a very polite, very well brought up, wouldn't hurt a fly person, you still have that evil of sin in your heart.

Even if you're very well brought up, so you never actually quite express it. And the way Paul is coming at that is saying that the Jews are spiritually educated.

They have the Torah. They have the word of God. They know the ways of God. They have the heritage. In some ways they are the chosen people. Even they are sinners and need salvation.

[31:18] And the Gentile, the non-Jew, who has been worshipping frogs and telling fortunes and tea leaves, that's how ignorant the Gentiles are.

They're sinners too. Both alike are sinners and that sin is as sinful as can be. By God's grace, no human being is yet as bad as we could be.

Yet apart from God's grace, sin affects every single one of us to the very core. That's one of the quotes, one of the applications of Isaiah's teaching on sin.

And it's deeply humiliating for us all. Bless him, C.S. Lewis, in his Narnia books, said about human beings, so he says it in his Narnia way, a son of Adam and a daughter of Eve.

That is, now what does he say, nobility enough to lift the head of the poorest beggar. And it is, now what does he say, disgrace enough to bow the head of the noblest king.

[32:24] Being human, we're made in the image of God. How wonderful that is. We're sinners. How humiliating that is for all of us. Second application point, which you might have clocked in your mind, is Matthew 13, which is Jesus quoting Isaiah on this subject.

And in Matthew 13, 14 to 17, it comes up in Jesus' ministry method of parables.

And in Matthew 13, 14, he's teaching in parables, and Jesus says, in them, that's to say, in the people who hear the parables, but don't get it.

They love hearing the parables, but they don't get the point. In them, Matthew 13, 14, is fulfilled. The prophecy of Isaiah, you will be ever hearing, but never understanding.

You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused, or hard. They hardly hear with their ears. They have closed their eyes.

[33:41] Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them. It's about hardening. And it's quoting Isaiah chapter 6.

So if you want to put one finger in Matthew, and another finger in Isaiah chapter 6, you will remember this. This is the commissioning of Isaiah as prophet. And he is, this is where Kodesh, Kodesh, Kodesh, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord Almighty.

And here, the Lord says to Isaiah, Isaiah 6, verse 9, go and speak to these people. You're a prophet. Go and speak to these people.

And this is what you say to them. Be ever hearing, but never understanding. Be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Says the Lord, make the heart of this people calloused.

Make their ears dull. Close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. That's what Jesus quotes. And what's Jesus saying about this?

[34:58] Isaiah had a heartfelt calling to his own people, and he spoke to them and called to them, but it only had the effect of hardening them.

It's a pretty grim sort of ministry, isn't it? In his ministry, there were a little group of people who did believe. And I think that's I and the children you have given me.

I think it's that little embryonic group or a remnant that is left. A remnant shall return. But most of them were hardened. What a grim thing that is.

But in God's mysterious provenance, the hardening was the way to the future because at the end of Isaiah chapter 6, it talks about stumps being cut down and the holy seed will be the stump in the land.

And there's something that's going to grow up again. So it leads through hardening to something growing. And I wonder whether Jesus would have said his ministry was like that.

[36:04] That he spoke best preacher ever, but people still didn't all listen to him. Some did, but some people didn't.

Didn't get it. Jesus' ministry was not accepted by the nation as a whole. but that rejection led to his death.

And his death led to redemption. Didn't it? You with me? That process of rejection led to his death. If they hadn't rejected, he wouldn't have died.

But his death was actually necessary. And through his death there came redemption. And I don't want to confuse you with all the mystery of that, but the point was that they heard more and got harder.

Now when I was a school teacher, my head of department, I think with a smile on his face, said, I've just got the results of what used to be, what nowadays would be the SAT tests or something like that. I've just got the results of the tests we've done and the teaching that we've given over the past three years to these boys, boys it was actually.

[37:20] And he says, this person here actually knows less now than when we started, which I thought was quite an achievement really. Taught them for three years and they knew less. Spiritually, that's a disaster, isn't it?

Absolute disaster. To have attended church year on year on year and know less about God than you did when you started. To be harder.

To be less concerned about sin. To be less grateful to the Savior. To be less desirous of serving God.

What a terrible thing. Here is sin as it works out in hardness. But we can have confidence that even hardening does not defeat God's ultimate purposes.

Look around at our nation which has been hardened. God's purposes are not defeated. Thirdly, remedy for sin. Now there is a remedy for sin.

[38:26] And chapter 1, we go back there to verse 18. God says, come, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as wool.

Though they are red as crimson, sorry, white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. There is a solution, a remedy for sin.

Now in the chapter that we've got, there are some things that are said and some things that are not said. So let's do the things that are said first. There can be a full and wonderful cleansing from sin. Isn't that brilliant? My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul. Isn't it brilliant that in this world of sin there is one place where sin can be forgiven, wiped away, taken away, though your sins are scarlet.

[39:36] they shall be as white as snow. The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord. Isn't that brilliant? See the scandal of it, the scandal of it is that, you know, Jimmy Savile, the child molester, would be a sort of really epitomized evil and we say we're all better than him.

but even if he had believed on the Lord Jesus, his sins would have been wiped away. Could you accept that? Or would you say, oh, it's okay for me but not for him.

The vilest offender does actually include you and me who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. Well, that's stated. There can be a wonderful cleansing from sin.

And another thing that's stated is that there needs to be a turning of the life away from sin. And this is called repentance and you can see it here, can't you, in verse, chapter 1, verse 16.

[40:43] Wash, make yourselves clean, take your evil deeds out of my sight, stop doing wrong, learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed. In verse 19, if you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land.

If you resist and rebel, you'll be eaten by the sword. It's not saying that God only saves goody good people, but what it's saying is that part of this process is to hate sin, to realize it's there, and rather than say, it's rather nice actually, adds a little bit of variety to life, to say, this is a hateful, abominable thing.

I know I'm caught up in it, but I hate it, and to turn from it. And that's why the Bible talks about repentance, and this is stated clearly here.

For someone to become a Christian, they need to turn from sin to God. And faith, real faith in Jesus Christ is always repenting faith.

It's always the faith that is turning from self to the Savior. and spiritual turning is needed, but cannot be achieved without spirit power.

[41:57] So there's a bit of a conundrum here. Lord, I need to turn from my sin, but I'm actually so entangled with it, even that's a difficult thing to do. Help me. Have mercy on me, a sinner.

Help me to turn from my sin to the Savior to whom I look. And that's what crying out to God for salvation is. Have you ever cried out like that?

It doesn't have to make a big song and dance about it. In the Bible, there's people who are converted with sort of great agonies and cries and there are people who are converted and it just happens so sweetly and simply that, you know, it's happened, but there's hardly any song and dance about it.

Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened to receive the words spoken by Paul, there she is in the kingdom. But there needs to be a repentance. And repentance is the flip side of regeneration. Regeneration is being born again. Being born again is the work that God does to make you new and repentance is the human bit where you start doing things that you never thought you could do to turn from sin in the power of God.

[43:07] So those are the things that are stated. Now what's not stated? Now what's not stated is how could God possibly forgive sin? Now it's not stated in that passage.

It's stated elsewhere. But how does this happen? Is it because God doesn't actually care too much? Is God slightly less moral than we are?

So he says, oh, I'm not that bothered. No. That's not the answer. Does he do this because of animal sacrifices?

Now that would be a big question for the Israelites there. Now nowadays, Jewish people are unable to perform animal sacrifices, which is quite a problem, isn't it?

Because the religion of the Hebrew scriptures has got a lot to do with animal sacrifices. Without the shedding of blood, there's no permission of sins. So what can possibly take that place?

[44:09] And my understanding is that the modern answer is good works, which I don't think is adequate. But the Bible answer is not animal sacrifices, but a person who is sacrificed, whose blood is shed, who takes the wrath of God for sinners.

And that person is Jesus. Jesus. That's exactly what he did when he died on the cross. And another thing that is not stated is how does God change the human heart?

So in other words, how can he say this faithful city has become a harlot and then almost simultaneously say, but afterwards you will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city?

How can there be such a deep change in the human heart? how can you turn from resistance and rebellion? How can there be redemption and turning?

How can God say all the survivors will be fruitful and glorious? How does that happen? And the New Testament will say, I can explain that to you because here is the work of the Holy Spirit in turning a hardened, unresponsive heart into a different heart, giving a new heart.

[45:30] So when Jesus said to Nicodemus, you must be born again. And Nicodemus said, I don't get that bit.

And Jesus said to Nicodemus, you are Israel's teacher and you haven't got that. You don't realize that. You must be born again. That's a statement of need because that's the amount of change that's needed.

And that is what God does. So it's a need and a promise. You must be born again by the Spirit. My translation, the watery Spirit, the Spirit who is poured out, the Spirit who enlivens, the Spirit who irrigates the heart.

That's the need of the sinner and the gift of God. So let's draw to a conclusion. So I'm going to say, this is my conclusion, everybody here is a sinner.

I'm just going to ask, what sort of sinner are you? You're going to say, I'm not a sinner. And God says, actually, you are. What sort of sinner are you? A sinner like Israel.

[46:33] Blind, self-confident, stupid, deceived by your own self and your religion. Hard. Are you that sort of sinner? God have mercy on you.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Are you like a Gentile sinner? Ignorant, crude, gross behavior sinner.

Never really got the hang of the Ten Commandments or any of those things. You just do whatever pleases you. And here you are and God says, come now, let us reason together.

Your sins are scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Are you like the leaders that Jesus addressed who were hard-hearted and the more they heard, the less they took notice?

If your heart become hard, you've been to church so often that it all runs off you and the things that used to scare you you got used to, things that used to attract you have lost any sort of attraction and now you are hard.

[47:38] God have mercy on me, a sinner. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. He's offering that to you, even in your hardness. Lord, don't let my heart get hard.

Come now. Like the tax collector, you are a sinner, like the tax collector who said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. Maybe for the first time, you can say this morning, he's described me, these passages in the Bible describe me.

I'm going to be honest about it. It's a humiliating thing to say, that's me. God be merciful to me, a sinner. And according to Jesus' promise, you could pray that prayer and leave this room justified with God, right with God, everything new, all washed away.

Will you pray that prayer just now if you haven't prayed it before? Or maybe you're somebody who prayed that prayer a long time ago and you're conscious that you're still a sinner and you are a turning sinner, if you like, a person whose life is now a life of repentance.

Lord, I have turned to you, but every day I turn again from my sin to my Savior. Every day I confess my sins.

[49:00] Every day I thank him for the promise of forgiveness. And I look forward to the day when sin will vex me and trip me up no more. I look forward to that day when I see his face.