

PM Isaiah 1:1-20 Come... and be cleansed

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- [0 : 0 0] the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
- Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O 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.
- Our sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, a children who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord.
- They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down?
- [1 : 0 9] Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds.
- They are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire.
- In your very presence, foreigners devour your land. It is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.
- If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom.
- Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts.
- [2 : 3 0] I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?
- 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 have become a burden to me. I am 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 of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good.
- [3 : 3 7] Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. 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.

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Let's come now before God in prayer.

Let's turn now to the word of God in Isaiah chapter 1. And you won't be surprised that my text is verse 18.

[4 : 47] 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. Over the coming months, I hope to be preaching here about once a month.

We'll be looking in the mornings at Deuteronomy. But in the evenings, I want us to look at some of the great invitations of the Bible.

And in particular, invitations that contain that word, come. There are lots of them.

Just to give a few examples. Genesis 7, God said to Noah, come into the ark. Exodus 24, God said to Moses, come up to me on the mount.

[5 : 58] In Isaiah 55, that famous invitation, come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Matthew 11, possibly an even more famous invitation, come to me, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Luke 14, come, for all is now ready. John 6, all that the Father gives me, will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will not cast out.

John 7, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me, and drink. And Revelation 21, the spirit and the bride, say, come.

Now God, is a welcoming God, who is always saying, come. And usually, that is an invitation, to something good.

[7 : 16] Here it's an invitation, to come, and be cleansed, from our sins. What could be better, and what could be more important, than that?

I want us to, consider tonight, first the invitation itself, come, and let us reason together. And then the proposition, that God makes to them, to be cleansed.

A divine solution, to a desperate problem. Both for Israel then, and for ourselves now. First of all though, the background, that's always important, in scripture.

Isaiah lived in, the 8th century BC, in Jerusalem. Tells us himself, in verse 1, his ministry stretched, over the reign, of four kings.

Isaiah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Tradition has it, that he lived on, into the reign, of a fifth king, Manasseh, who had him martyred.

[8 : 33] Israel, Israel by now, was divided, into two kingdoms, Israel in the north, with its capital, at Samaria, Judah in the south, with its capital, at Jerusalem.

Both, had turned away, from the Lord, and the judgment, of the Lord, hung heavy, over them both. In Isaiah's lifetime, the Assyrians, came and conquered, Samaria, and took the people, away, into exile.

They threatened, Jerusalem as well, but they turned back, after Hezekiah's prayer. In the future though, Isaiah could see, the Babylonians coming, and they would take, the people of Judah, away into exile.

But beyond that, he could also see, light at the end, of the tunnel. They would return, from exile, and one day, the Messiah, the Savior, would come.

Here, in chapter 1, he delivers, a devastating, denunciation, upon the whole land, for their sin.

[9 : 58] It makes painful reading, doesn't it? God, says, that they're like, rebellious children. It's as if, they didn't even know Him.

He compares, the animals, favorably, with Israel. The ox, knows, its owner, and the donkey, its master's crib. But Israel, does not know.

My people, do not understand. In verse 4, he describes them, as, as, as, as, a people, laden, with iniquity.

People, who have forsaken, and despised Him. That's the root, of all their problems. Rejecting God, has led, to all kinds, of immorality.

As it always does. In verse 5, he says, they're corrupt, through and through. It isn't just, a superficial problem.

[11 : 09] Corruption, runs through, every level, of society, and into the very depths, of their hearts. And as a result, their land is, left desolate, overrun, by their enemies.

And they deserved it. They deserved destruction, like Sodom and Gomorrah. And they should be grateful, that the Lord, had left them, even a small remnant.

He rejects, even their sacrifices. It's all hypocrisy, he says. Bring me no more, vain offerings. These people, were religious, but it was all, just empty ritual.

He rejects, even their prayers. There are not many places, in scripture, where God says, he will not hear, someone's prayer. But here, in verse 15, though you make, many prayers, I will not listen, because your hands, are full, of blood.

It's rather like, Romans 1, isn't it? Where Paul denounces, the sins of his own, day. And the purpose, is the same. To show, their desperate, need of salvation.

[12 : 31] They need to repent, he says. And put things right. Verse 16, wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil, of your deeds, from before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice, to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

No one could argue, with that. That is, pure religion. As James says, to visit orphans, and widows, in their affliction, and to keep oneself, unspotted, from the world.

That is what God, expects of them. Yet, if the chapter, ended there, with God, basically saying, it's up to you, sort yourselves out.

I think we would all feel, rather uneasy. Can we ever live up, to that, perfect vision, of righteousness, in verse 16?

And what about, the sins of the past? Can they ever be forgiven? But thankfully, the chapter, doesn't end there.

[13 : 51] God now, issues this, wonderful invitation, in our text. Let's look now, at the invitation itself.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Here is the Lord, taking the initiative, as he always does.

Israel, ought to have been, taking the initiative. They should have been, on bended knee, saying, Lord, please help us, in this dreadful plight, we're in.

But they're not. So God, takes the initiative, and he invites them, to come, and talk things, over. How amazing, that is, that the eternal God, should invite, sinful men, to come, and discuss things, with him.

You know, reading through, that chapter just now, even as I read, it struck me, how different, it could sound, according to the tone, with which you read it.

[15 : 07] Do we read it, in a spirit of, anger? Is God saying, ah, sinful nation, a people, laden with iniquity, away with you.

Or is he saying, it with tears, ah, sinful nation, a people, laden with iniquity. I rather tend, to think it's the latter.

Rather like our Lord, in Matthew 23, remember how he lays, into the sins, of the Pharisees, and then come the words, oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often, I wanted to gather you, to myself.

Isn't it the same here? Even as the Lord, condemns them, for their sins, still in his love, he's reaching out, to them. Come now, let's sort this out, together.

It's rather like a judge, in a court case, inviting the defendant, to come into chambers. Look, he's saying, you've heard the evidence, your case is, completely hopeless.

[16 : 27] You deserve judgment. But nonetheless, come into my chambers, and let's talk this over, because I have a proposition, for you.

And he says, the same to us. We too, have committed sins. Whether our sins, are as bad, as Israel's, I leave you to judge.

But we are all, guilty before God. And yet, God in his love, invites us to come, and talk things over. To consider, the proposition, that he has for us.

Christ, which is nothing less, than the gospel, of Christ. This is where it starts, for most of us.

Thinking it over. Stopping from all, the rush of this world. Putting aside, all the multitude, of thoughts, and anxieties, and anxieties, that we have.

[17 : 31] Putting aside, whatever thoughts, we might have had, about God, and simply stopping, and thinking afresh. Facing up, to the reality, of our sin, and considering, God's way, of redemption.

religion. This invitation, proves incidentally, that religion, is not opposed, to reason. Some people, seem to imagine, that you have to, switch your mind off, when you become a Christian.

That all it requires, is blind faith. Far from it. God, actually invites us here, to reason, things through. But make sure, you're asking, the right questions.

Some people, get caught up, in all kinds of, philosophical, and scientific questions, and see no further, than that. Don't get me wrong, those are important questions, and it's not wrong, to study them.

But the really, important question is, what are you going, to do, about your sins? Let's look now, at the proposition, that God makes, that he, will cleanse us, from sin.

[18 : 51] A divine solution, to a desperate problem. Though your sins, are like scarlet, he says, they shall be, white as snow. Though they are, red like crimson, they shall become, like wool.

How? He doesn't explain, at this point. But he assures us here, that it's possible. He can do it. Indeed, he says it twice, to emphasize it.

Hebrew poetry, often emphasizes, something, by saying it twice, in two similar, but slightly different forms. Scarlet sins, will become, white as snow.

Crimson sins, will become, like wool. It's the same thought, in two different ways. Complete cleansing, from the very worst, of sins.

So let's consider here, first, the desperate problem, that we have. Sins, like scarlet, red, as crimson.

[20 : 01] Scarlet, and crimson, were, two dyes, that were, used in the, ancient world. They were both, very, highly valued.

In Exodus, 26, the curtains, of the tabernacle, were made, of fine twined, linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, yarns. Exodus, 39, the high priest's, garments, were made, in the same way, with scarlet.

Two, Chronicles 2, Solomon, asked the king of Tyre, to provide a man, who could, work in various materials, including, scarlet, for the work, of the temple.

Tyre, being, one of the main centers, of manufacture, for these, these ties. Princes, were often, clothed in scarlet.

Matthew, 27, when the, soldiers, put a scarlet, robe, on Jesus, that was a way, of mocking him, for the claim, that he was the king, of the Jews.

[21 : 13] So what does it mean, for our sins, to be like scarlet, or as red, as crimson? Well the thought is, perhaps partly, the vivid color, suggesting, perhaps, the shame, of our sins, that they are, open, and seen, and seen, by everyone, but perhaps, also, and mainly, their indelible nature.

You cannot, remove them. Scarlet, and crimson, were indelible dyes, for all practical purposes.

You couldn't, remove them. And that was a good thing. If you were making, robes for a prince, you didn't want them, to wash out, the first time it rained.

But it wasn't so good, if you actually, wanted white garments, and you'd got those dyes, on them. In the scriptures, white garments, are often associated, with holiness.

Our desperate problem, is that those white garments, have become stained, indelibly, with our sin. Indeed, there may be the thought here, of a double dye.

[22 : 44] Scarlet cloth, was stained, right the way through. And likewise here, we're stained, right through, with our sins. Now Israel's sins, were quite clearly, like Scarlet.

Literally so, in some cases. Remember how he says, your hands are, full of blood. But what about us? People nowadays, get very upset, if you talk to them, about sin.

Especially, if you say, that they are sinners. And yet, most people, I imagine, would be prepared, to admit, that they have, at least occasionally, done a few things, wrong, in their lives.

There might be, a few deluded people, out there, who really do think, they are whiter than white, that they've never, done anything wrong. But I've never met, anyone like that.

Most people, know, that there are things, that are wrong, in their lives. They may not like, the word sin. They may prefer, to talk about, having faults, or of having made, mistakes, or of having made, the wrong decisions, in life.

[24 : 02] They might have, a whole list, of excuses, that they make. But they all know, and we all know, in our hearts, that we are, far, far, from perfect.

The Bible, doesn't make any excuses, and it doesn't, mince words. The Bible is, completely unsparing. Paul says, in Romans 3, all have sinned, and fall short, of the glory, of God.

All of us. The Bible, uses various words, for it, sin, transgression, iniquity, and so on, with different, shades of meaning. We've broken, God's laws.

We've fallen short, of God's standards. We've crossed, over the boundaries, that God has set, for us. All of these sins, have offended, against God.

They have hurt, other people. And they have, probably harmed us, as well. We all know, in our hearts, that that is true.

[25 : 11] Some people, might dispute, the seriousness, of their sins. Their sins, they would say, are no worse, than others.

They've not committed, any terrible sins. Their sins, they would say, perhaps, are not scarlet sins. They're more, like a shade of pink.

Or perhaps, they see themselves, as white, with a few, pink spots. Nothing. Too much, to get worried about. But the truth is, sin is sin.

However serious, it is, or however small, it is. It is still sin. An arrow, that misses its mark, has missed it.

Whether it misses it, by an inch, or by three feet. A man, who breaks through, a fence, is a trespasser. Whether he just, steps a foot inside, or walks a mile inside.

[26 : 17] A stain, is a stain. Whether it's, a deep scarlet, or crimson, or pink. And you still, need cleansing, from it.

However small, that stain is. You know, that if you get some stain, on your clothing, I'm very prone to this. I'm, very clumsy, and I spill things on me.

Jane complains, and points out, that on my shirt, maybe there's a little bit of, I don't know, tomato soup, or whatever. I can't go out, like that. It's only a tiny stain.

But it's there. Everyone can see it. And it shouldn't be there. And it spoils my whole appearance. It has to be cleansed, before I can go, out anywhere.

And those little stains, are quite easy to cleanse. Scarlet and crimson, aren't. And if we really, begin to think about it, we may begin to realize, that our sins, are actually worse, than we thought.

[27 : 25] It's more than just, a few little spots. Especially, once you start, reasoning with God, about it. Once you start, reasoning, from the scriptures.

Listening to God's word. Listening to God's spirit. You know, it's a major part, of the work of the spirit of God, to convict us of sin.

To show us, what we are really like. To show us, how we really stand, in God's eyes. To show us the judgment, that we really deserve, from God.

When we realize, just how bad, our sins are, then we begin, to feel guilt, and shame, and fear. Not emotions, that people want to feel, of course.

That's why, people avoid, thinking about sin. But emotions, that we need, to feel, in order to appreciate, our need, of salvation.

[28 : 33] I doubt, if the Lord, ever really shows us, the full depth, of our sins. Because he knows, that we couldn't bear it. But even just, a glimpse, of our true self, should cause us, to cry out, what must I do, to be saved.

Well, what must we do? Well, we will never, successfully, cleanse ourselves, of sin. However hard, we try. There's a, heart-wrenching scene, in Shakespeare's, Macbeth, when, Lady Macbeth, realizes, the full horror, of what she, and Macbeth, have done, in murdering, King Duncan.

And, imagining the blood, on her hands, she washes her hands, obsessively. And, she cries out, all the perfumes, of Arabia, will not sweeten, this little hand.

So, what will, cleanse us, of our sins? Let's come, to the divine solution. God promises, even though your sins, are like scarlet, as bad, as they possibly, could be.

Yet, they shall be, white as snow. Even though, they're like crimson, they shall become, white, like wool. In other words, you will be, perfectly cleansed.

[30 : 05] How? The answer is, of course, through the Messiah, through, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ. Isaiah, himself, will go on, to prophesy this.

He will go on, to speak, of how the Messiah, will come, and will die for us, to cleanse us, from sin. In Isaiah 53, but he was, pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed, for our iniquities.

Upon him, was the chastisement, that brought us peace. And with his wounds, we are healed. He's speaking there, of course, about the cross, when Jesus died, for our sins.

The just, for the unjust, that he might bring us, to God. The New Testament, explains it more fully. Romans 3, 24, for example, having shown, that we are all sinners, Paul says, we are justified, by his grace, as a gift, through the redemption, that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward, as a propitiation, by his blood, to be received, by faith.

2 Corinthians 5, 21, for our sake, he made him, to be sin, who knew no sin, that we might become, the righteousness of God, in him. And in 1 John 1, 7, the blood of Jesus, cleanses us, from all sin.

[31 : 39] In the Old Testament, they had sacrifices, for sin, lambs and goats, were slain, and their blood, was offered up, on the altar. But these merely, pointed to Christ.

When Jesus appeared, John the Baptist said, behold thee, Lamb of God, who takes away, the sin of the world. All those old sacrifices, are no longer necessary.

the one true sacrifice, has come. Through faith, in Christ, all of our sins, however serious, small or large, one-off sins, or habitual sins, superficial sins, or deeply ingrained sins, they can all, be forgiven.

And not only, does Christ, take away our sins, he gives us, his righteousness, so that we appear, in God's sight, as white as snow, white as wool.

Here is the answer, to David's prayer, in Psalm 51, which we sang, purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter, than snow. Yes, even sins like David's.

[33 : 03] He had committed, adultery, he had lied, constructively, he had committed murder. Even he, could be cleansed.

The redeemed in heaven, in Revelation 7, are seen in white robes. What do those, white robes signify? John is told, they have washed their robes, and made them white, in the blood, of the lamb.

And it doesn't stop there. When we trust in Christ, God sends his spirit, to cleanse us within, to help us to fulfill, those high ideals, of verses 16 and 17.

Paul says in Titus, God saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewal, of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us, richly, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

It's all summed up, in Peter's, answer to the crowds, on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, and verse 38. Peter had confronted, the crowds, with their sins, and they certainly, had blood, on their hands, literally, the blood of Christ.

[34 : 28] Peter says to them, this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has made, both Lord, and Christ. And quite rightly, touched by the Spirit of God, they cry out, what shall we do?

Peter answers, repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness, of sins. And you will receive, the gift, of the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness, and the Spirit. That's the promise. Cleansing, both from the guilt, and the power, of sin.

But it all, rests upon the cross. There was a deep irony, in the soldiers, clothing Jesus, with a scarlet robe.

Very soon, his body, would be covered, in scarlet. Covered with his blood, running down, from the wounds, on the cross. That, crimson blood, cleanses us, of our crimson sins.

[35 : 38] So, let me ask you then, as we close, have you known, that cleansing? Maybe some of you here, or maybe some, who might listen online, you still, bear, the guilt, of sin, in your own conscience.

And you bear that guilt, because you have never, truly come to Christ. Do you know about him? You come to church, perhaps. But you've never, really trusted him, personally.

You know, coming to church, is never enough. We must come, to the Lord, of the church. These Jews, in Isaiah's day, they were religious people.

They were offering up, all their sacrifices, and prayers. And God, rejected them. You need Christ. Only he, can truly, cleanse you, from your sin.

Come, let us, reason together. God said to Israel, he says the same, perhaps, to you tonight. Come, and think about, these things.

[37 : 00] Apply them, to yourself, personally. is it reasonable, to reject, so wonderful, a salvation? Surely, we should come, to Christ, eagerly, and at once.

But most of you, I'm sure, you have come, to Christ, and you have known, the power, of the blood, as the old preachers, used to put it. And you rightly rejoice, in so great, a salvation.

And yet, sometimes, perhaps, you still stumble, stumble into sin. What do you do then? And sometimes, perhaps, doubts come over you, about past sins.

The answer is the same, every time. Go, back, to the cross. Go to the fountain, that has been opened, for sin.

He can wash away, every sin. Even the sins, that we have committed, as Christians. He can make you, completely, clean.

[38 : 21] May, all of us here, become, white as snow, white as wool, through the blood, of Jesus Christ. Amen.