

The Colors of Joy (White)

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Preacher: Jayson Turner

[0 : 00] Amen. Amen. Did you enjoy that church? Thank you worship team.! Let's ask God's blessing on our study and focus our attention on Him this morning.

Let's pray. Lord, it is good to be here this morning. We're so desperate for you, Jesus, for your help today, for your activity in our lives.

Lord, we need your activity in this world. We want to pray for those there in Australia this morning. I heard the news of the shooting on the beach.

Eleven Jewish people lost their lives at the beginning of Hanukkah. Lord, our hearts are heavy as we think about just darkness and evil in this world.

And we know that the gospel is our only remedy, our only hope. And so it is good for us to be here this morning, to be reminded that the things that you have spoken in your word, Father, are true.

[1 : 39] And so would you speak to us? Would you open our eyes this morning that we would behold wonderful things from your law? And Lord, if there is some here this morning that have never trusted in Jesus as their Savior, I pray that they would hear good news and they would respond.

Because at the end of days, the only thing that matters is whether we have an advocate. We have you, Jesus, as our Savior. And so we commit our time to you. We pray that you would move our attention, our affections from small things to you.

And Lord, that we could worship well this month. We commit all this for your glory, Jesus alone. In your name we pray. And all God's people said, amen.

Amen. Amen. Well, we are quickly approaching Christmas and we are trying to suck the marrow out of Christmas. So every time we gather in December, we're doing Christmas. It's actually less than two weeks before Christmas Day arrives.

And as I mentioned in my preamble, we are doing an Advent series utilizing the colors of the season to really to try to focus our hearts on worship. And we're trying to, we're taking something that actually God used, he painted his creation with colors, something that accompanies our celebrations of the season.

[3 : 01] We have particular colors that we typically use, red, white, green, and gold. And what I'm trying to do with these colors is associate each of them with a promise, baptizing our imaginations that as we see those colors around us, whether it's Christmas lights or packages or just decorations, as we see those colors, it would stir our hearts to a promise that God has made to his people, to the church.

Promises that actually transcend the season these are promises that we really ought every one of us to carry for a lifetime. And so we're talking about true things this morning and this is not some cute Advent series.

This is for our soul. This is for our soul joy. And so I pray that you would receive these promises and you would hear God's voice whisper to you if you have trusted in Christ that this is true for you.

And so I'm really trying to ruin Christmas a little bit from a kind of a shallow experience to heighten our affections for the best things of this holiday season.

And last week we considered the color red and the promise of Christmas red being that God says, my love is vast and I will return.

[4 : 19] That Jesus came as the sacrificial lamb and shed his very red blood for you and me and he will return with the roar of a lion someday.

And that day could be approaching sooner than we realize. I don't know. I'm not a prophet but I just, as I see the world events, I don't know how things can get any more desperate and dark before he returns.

And he will return and he's promised to return. In fact, we have this prophecy in Isaiah we looked at last week from Isaiah 63. The man in crimson returning to crush evil for good and to make all things right.

Church, that's a huge promise. You should, you should live your life with that promise. That God's love for you is vast and he's returning. And I think as we think about this promise, it actually means something profound for your joy.

It means that perhaps the ache that you feel in your heart for whatever, whatever loss you're experiencing in this life, whatever, whatever trauma has touched your life or perhaps whatever sorrow accompanies your heart even today, it will not always be that way.

[5 : 40] You have an experience that's difficult in your heart today, it's not always going to be that way. And this promise says, you know what? I'm returning. So that's not escapism, church.

That's rather expectation that we're not always going to experience the ache that we have today. And in fact, as we consider like eternity, it's just a speck on the ticker tape of eternity.

So whatever the condition of your soul today, it will not always be that way if there's sorrow and heartache. In fact, we have what Titus writes in Titus 2.13 as our blessed hope, right?

The return, the glorious appearing of our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And that's the promise of Christmas red. I will return and make all things as they ought to be. Amen? That's for our joy.

This morning, we're going to continue to build upon this joy and we're going to consider a second color, the color of white. And if you haven't figured out, we're thematizing our platform.

[6 : 47] I don't take credit for that, but it's pretty cool. You know, there is a wistfulness or a nostalgia, I think, when we come to this particular Christmas color.

The most popular American song ever written is attributed to a Russian-Jewish immigrant, Irving Berlin. The song is White Christmas.

This was a man that could not even read or write musical notation and yet he composed over a thousand songs. And the one that he considered his finest, in fact, after he completed it, he walked into his publisher's office and he announced to his musical secretary, I have just written a new song. Not only is it the best song I've ever written, it is the best song anybody's ever written. I mean, that's confidence. That's moxie.

You've got to love that. Now, White Christmas, this song, it premiered on radio at Christmastime in 1941. That was 18 days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

[7 : 56] This song aired on Bing Crosby's radio show and only eight months later, moviegoers would see and hear Crosby sing it in the film Holiday Inn. There is something almost transcendent, you could say luminous, in what this song conjures in our imaginations.

It's a longing for better days, perhaps days gone by. And it was actually in 1942, the first winter that the American troops had spent overseas.

And so these images of a snowy American landscape at Christmastime stirred homesickness for the troops, for their homeland and families that they had left behind. And so this song is just pregnant with longing and the desire for things to be really as they ought to be.

There's melancholy to this song. And I think this song actually can transport us to memories of Christmases gone by. And in fact, Crosby, when he traveled overseas to perform this for the troops in World War II, the carol was always the most requested song despite Bing's reservations about performing it.

And he said to an interview about this, he said, I hesitated about doing it because invariably it caused such a nostalgic yearning among the men that it made them sad. Heaven knows I didn't come that far to make them sad.

[9 : 20] For this reason, several times I tried to cut it out of the show, but these guys just hollered for it. Who doesn't love a white Christmas? I think it's an echo of really our longing for heaven, church.

church. We want things to be as they ought to be. In fact, I have a distinct memory as a child in 1978 and 79 living in the suburbs of Chicago and that Christmas we had 10 inches of snow on the ground.

Another, over the course of three days, 18 more inches were added. We had like 30 inches of snow and I still remember being a kid on the garage roof. I was allowed to get up there and shovel it off and then could just jump off of it into the garage this white powder and I just remember like the streets, everything just blanketed in white.

Christmas lights reflecting off the evening snow and maybe the memories have inflated over the years in my mind, but there's just still this longing and it was so strange to think about doing this message and to look outside and we have absolutely nothing in the way of white going on out there. You know, God utilizes this color, this image in Scripture and what I'd like to do this morning is just consider one verse and in this verse I want us to hear really the devastation in the voice of the writer, the psalmist that pens this.

[10:53] There is an ache, there is a sadness and there is really a sorrow in his words. And so I'm going to take it from Psalm 51 and we're going to look just at verse 7 this morning and this is what the psalmist writes.

He says, Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. There's a lot of regret in this sentence.

A lot of ache. You hear from the psalmist his heart, he's writing, you know, I want to go backwards. I want to go back to better days.

I want to go back to days before it all went wrong. Before I screwed everything up. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

And I think the ache of the psalmist here is akin to something similar that we hear from the individual in the Old Testament, Esau, after selling his birthright to his brother just for a bowl of stew.

[12:08] And then later it says in Hebrews 12, 17 that Esau, he wept, he wanted the birthright back, he sought it with tears and yet he couldn't.

He couldn't go back. It was gone even as he wept. And you hear that same sort of ache in the psalmist here, friends. You know, Psalm 51 is unusual as far as psalms go because we actually know the specific historical event associated with the writing of this psalm, this prayer, this song. Of the 150 psalms that we have, there's actually only 14 of them with superscriptions explicitly telling us the occasion.

And Psalm 51 is one of them. So we know why it was written. And to know the story of the psalm is to understand something of really the profound anguish and regret and grief associated with this psalm.

And so let's back up and just look at the first verse here of Psalm 51. It says, to the choir master, a psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone to Bathsheba, have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

[13:44] So David, God's man, a righteous king, he is an Old Testament type of Christ, he one day intentionally forgets.

He forgets who he is. He forgets whose he is. And then we read of the narrative in 2 Samuel chapter 11 beginning in verse 2.

It happened late one afternoon when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing.

And the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

So David sent messengers and took her. And she came to him and he lay with her. Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house and the woman conceived and sent and told David, I am pregnant.

[15:07] and both their worlds just shattered to pieces. Everything went so very wrong in a moment of indiscretion?

No. Incredible selfishness? Yes. Sin? Absolutely. Actions that could not be reversed.

This is David, friends. This is King David. This is the revered king. This is the guy that you tell your sons, grow up and be like this guy.

David should have, would have, could have been out in battle on this day leading his men. But instead, on this day, his guard was down.

And he did the unthinkable. In fact, he was where he wasn't supposed to be. And he commits adultery.

[16:20] I'm not going to use the word, but let's not whitewash this story because the truth may be closer to him forcing himself upon this woman.

Why? Because no one denies the king. There is a power structure at play here. He then sends for this woman's husband to come home in order to cover his sin.

I'll get him to sleep with his wife and hide my indiscretion. The husband, of course, Uriah, he is a good man.

He forgoes intimacy with his wife and decides, hey, my fellow soldiers, they're in harm's way, fighting for the king. I need to be with them.

The king. Uriah is fighting for the king. Uriah is fighting for his king. He loved his king, David, the noble king, who on this day has become the worst sort of scoundrel.

[17 : 33] And so David, as his world is unraveling, decides to have Uriah killed in battle to try to cover, to hide his selfishness and lust, his sin.

He's like a child on this day. You know, a kid trying to cover their face, hiding.

No one can see me because I can't see you, and that's what David has been reduced to. I can cover my sin. No one will know what I've done. Friends, this is a scene that's played out since the very beginning of creation.

Adam hiding, from his God in the garden. And David follows suit. Well, God sends then his prophet to confront his anointed.

And you have to wonder for Nathan if this is the hardest ministry day of his life. Just imagine the stress for Nathan.

[18 : 39] Just the anxiety of thinking about having to confront King David, knowing that that meeting had to occur and perhaps Nathan experienced sleepless nights, maybe running the conversation over in his imagination.

And on this day when Nathan confronts David on his sin, he's brilliant. He approaches David. How does he approach him? He tells him a story.

Tells him a story of this rich man stealing resources from a man with very little, really exploiting him. I don't want to kill my own livestock to entertain my out-of-town guests, but I'm going to take yours. And so Nathan tells David the story and really draws out of David a righteous indignation towards evil, towards self-orientation.

And then Nathan connects the dots for David because he says in 2 Samuel 12, 7, he says, Nathan says to David, the story I just talked about, you're the man.

[19 : 53] You're the man. This, friends, is a dark moment of self-awareness for David.

his world at that moment just being ground to powder. He's been caught. And yet, there is something completely unexpected that comes out of Nathan's mouth.

It's unimaginable in how Nathan, speaking for God, handles this man after his confession knowing all the evil that he has perpetrated, the way that he has stolen from others.

There are, consequences, but listen to these words from 2 Samuel 12, 13. David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.

And Nathan said to him, the Lord also has put away your sin. you shall not die.

[21 : 07] What? What did we just hear from Nathan? Did you not just hear what David has done, what he's confessed to?

The Lord's put away your sin? What? This guy committed adultery or worse, deceit, manipulation, denial, murder.

A baby dies as a result. If this was in our day, imagine a news story, a dateline news story, expose of a man.

We're going to tell you about this man who brutalized his neighbor, this stay-at-home mom, gets her pregnant, murders her husband in order to cover up the initial crime, and you're thinking, man, no way that guy gets mercy, kind words, a pardon from a judge, and you start to feel this anger kind of well up in your soul.

And yet this man, David hears from Nathan, the Lord has also put away your sin. That's outrageous.

[22 : 17] That is grotesque evil, and yet it too receives a real pardon. It's a pardon built upon what?

Future grace. The birth and substitutionary death of a future king. That's not you, David. Nathan is speaking for God and immediately says to David, your sins are passed over.

forever. This is the scandal of David's life, friends. Amen? It's also the scandal of ours.

We have done everything David has done in our hearts. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount says this in Matthew 5, 22, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to

judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire. And then Jesus just continues to just put it out there, speaking it plain.

[23 : 42] This is what's going on in your heart. You're liable of the same sin, Matthew 5, 28, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And yet God says to us, based upon the entrance of a baby into our sin-marred bent world, a baby who grew up, lived a perfect life, died in our place, because of that, if you have trusted in Christ, you're clean.

You're clean. So friends, as we consider the promise of Christmas white, what is the promise from our Lord? It's, you're clean. You're clean.

You are forgiven for real if you have trusted in the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

You're clean. Sins, past, present, future, you're clean.

You're forgiven. The Lord has passed over those. And David here, he's crying out to God, perhaps believing something to be impossible, and he says in Psalm 51, 7, purge me with hyssop, and I'll be clean.

[25 : 07] Wash me, and I'll be whiter than snow. Now, hyssop was this small shrub used in ceremonial cleansing of lepers under the Old Testament law.

It was dipped, it says this in Leviticus 14, dipped in the sacrificial blood of an animal, and then sprinkled seven times on the person needing purification. And so David is crying out to God, his ultimate priest, that he would be forgiven, to count him as clean from his sin.

Friends, that's the longing of our hearts, that we would be forgiven, amen? That it would be true, that it would be real. This is our God, and this is the mission that operationally began at Christmas, for why Jesus entered into our time and place, so that those like David could actually be forgiven for good.

For men like Paul, that he could be forgiven. His story mimics David's in many ways in terms of the vile evil that he was involved in, and yet for Paul too, he said a similar thing.

1 Timothy 1.15, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

[26 : 43] I'm the worst. I love that Paul talks about the gospel here, but he doesn't do it in a theoretical way, he does it in a very personal way, right?

In fact, he inserts himself into the equation. He says, you know what? Christ came to die for sinners and I'm the worst. It's for me and it's for you.

Friends, that's the heart of Jesus. That's the heart of Jesus. To move towards the dirty and forgive. I appreciate how Dane Ortlund puts it in his book, Gently and Lowly. He says this, and what did he do when he saw the unclean?

What was his first impulse when he came across prostitutes and lepers? He moved towards them. Pity flooded his heart. The longing of true compassion.

[27 : 52] He spent time with them. He touched them. We all can testify to the humanness of a touch. A warm hug does something warm words of greeting alone cannot.

But there is something deeper in Christ's touch of compassion. He was reversing the Jewish system. When Jesus, the clean one, touched an unclean sinner, Christ did not become unclean, the sinner became clean.

That's the promise of Christmas white. If you're in Christ this morning, you're clean. There is great joy in being forgiven, friends.

Amen? That should be the greatest joy of our souls, that we're forgiven, that we're clean, that Romans 8, 1 is true, that in Christ there's no condemnation on our lives.

Could it be real? Yes! Because of what Christ accomplished on your and my behalf. life. And it causes an ache in our hearts, the wonder of it all, that we could be clean.

[28 : 59] I received a text just a couple days ago from a friend who's struggling to believe. I know a lot of Christians that seem to struggle on this front.

They believe that Jesus Christ died for everyone else but not for them because they know their secret sin. They know their thing. And I just reminded him, man, this is hard for us to stomach, it's hard for us to process and swallow because we don't live in a world where there is a simile for God.

Like we live in a world of ungrace. You don't see grace anywhere that is comparable to God's heart. And I just encourage him, it's true.

Would you please believe this? Would you believe this? Friends, this is what the enemy doesn't want you to believe. He wants you to question and he wants to accuse.

You did that. You did that thing. You did the unpardonable sin. Friends, the unpardonable sin is you reject Jesus in this life. That's the unpardonable sin.

[30 : 08] That's it. But as long as you're breathing, you have opportunity to repent of sin and trust Christ as your Savior. Savior. But I find so many Christians struggle with this and faith is reduced to a bunch of works that they do to feel like they somehow deserve God to forgive them.

That's insane. The promise of Christmas, right, white is you're forgiven, you're clean. And it has everything to do with what Jesus did completely. His work, not yours.

Your work is you brought sin to the equation for this mysterious, miraculous exchange. It's beautiful. It's for our joy. It's the best news there is. And it's real.

And I just want to exhort us here because I feel like the enemy, he's a thief and he wants to convince you you're not really forgiven. And it's a lie. It's a story war.

So believe what's true. So carry Christmas white with you the rest of your life, friends. Amen?

Amen? I have this wonderful memory from my college days, many lifetimes ago.

[31 : 19] But me and my roommate at the University of Washington, early 90s, had just finished our finals. Christmas break began and it started to snow. And the flakes were like, they were just massive.

And I just remember like that evening of being done and then just walking the University Ave and the whole campus was just covered in white. And it was like, it was serene.

It was almost eerie. The state really of complete, just, it was almost like, I don't want to email, please, okay? But it was like a holy quiet. It wasn't, but it felt like that.

And I just have this image in my mind of snow blanketing dingy streets, unkept landscape, you know, transforming everything.

Even Division Street into something beautiful. And it's like, that's the picture that we have here. The psalmist, clean me, wash me, make my heart wider than snow.

[32 : 23] And it's beautiful. Friends, confess your sin as the Spirit of God reveals, convicts, appropriate this gift daily.

And as you do, it's like snow, fall, covering every imperfection. It's for your joy, this Christmas, for the rest of your life. And as the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 118, he says, come, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Please believe it. Please. The promise of Christmas white.

You're clean. For real. Father, thank you for time together to consider the words of David. Lord, I'm so thankful that you have written a book where you have recorded some of the worst chapters in the lives of your people.

not for their shame, but for your glory and for our joy. So thank you. Thank you for telling us the truth, reminding us that the gospel is, it's beautiful and it's earthy and it's practical.

[33 : 42] And Lord, I pray that we would grow as a people that really believe that grace is for us.

That we would have better ways of interacting with one another because we believe that before you we are clean.

We stand rightly before you because of our advocate, Jesus Christ. Lord, I want to pray against the lies, the enemy, if there's some here even struggling this morning to believe this.

I pray that they would know the joy of repentance and gift that to them and they could repent, turn from their sin and turn towards you. And they could experience the joy of your salvation today. Lord, I pray that we would not be a concerned people that if we believe that grace is true, somehow the wheels will fall off and we will just live as rebels.

No, no. Because we know it's your kindness that leads us, draws us to repentance. And as we understand the gift, the magnitude of it, it transforms us. And there's a joy to live for you that life now not becomes works to be approved, but rather it is worship.

It's a response. And I pray that we would be able to respond today. And Lord, as we know that you have forgiven us of much, it would in turn affect the way that we love one another as well.

[34 : 58] Our families, our friends, and the world around us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.