

The Lord Redeems Israel

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 01] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Isaiah chapter 44, and reading at verse 22. Word of the Lord, I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.

The world that we live in is a very uncertain place, and will always be so. There's always somebody who's trying to rule and to control, somebody who is wanting to dominate, to exercise his power. There is always conflict, and it's one of the sad things to see. We so often see places in this world, even as we're seeing, looking at Ukraine just now, we're seeing tensions rising and rising, and there's always this sense of fear that people are being pushed and propelled towards a civil war. We pray that that won't happen, but it's awful when we see these sort of things happening. But when you look at the history of this world, it is one of conflict, of bloodshed, of intense human suffering and misery.

And there are times that we can look at the world, and we can despair. And there are times we say, well, what is going to happen? And if we look at things naturally, and we simply look at things as they are, without looking heavenwards, it would be very easy to fall into despair and to say, where is it all going to end?

[1 : 45] But when we come to God's word, we see that God is in control. And that's one of the great themes we saw this morning. We're looking at Jeremiah. And one of the great themes of God's word is that God shows that he is sovereign, that he rules, that he knows the end from the beginning, that God doesn't change his mind or alter his purposes.

God doesn't work the way that we do, where we have different ideas and plans, and we're often changing our mind. God doesn't respond, as it were, to situations that he never saw coming. He rules and controls everything. And although where we are, and where you are tonight, you may not understand God's purposes, and often we don't.

We've all got to remember, God says, my ways are not your ways, my thoughts are not your thoughts. But you've got to remember tonight that you love the Lord, that God is working. Now, this may seem so strange, because your circumstances might be tonight so painful, that God is going to work good for you. He is working it for your ultimate good.

[2 : 57] That might seem strange and hard to understand. But by faith, we've got to cling to that, because God's word is true, and he will do and fulfill what he says.

We're looking at that great promise in Jeremiah this morning. But God here is reassuring his people, because in these chapters in Isaiah, remember that this is all prophetic, and God, through the prophet, is reassuring his people, because they are heading into difficult times.

God's judgment is coming. It's something that cannot be avoided, because of the way that sin was working out in our life. But the important thing, really, is that God is highlighting to the people, look, you are my people.

And it's something that he reiterates over and over again. And he goes back so often and saying, look, I formed you. And when God talks about the forming of his people, and particularly when he talks about the forming of the nation of Israel, it goes right back to the call of Abraham.

Remember how Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees. And as God called Abraham out, he gave him great promises, and that these promises were going to be fulfilled, and that Abraham and his descendants were going to become a blessing to the whole world.

[4 : 25] That the whole world was going to be blessed through the descendants of Abraham. And he reiterated that promise to Isaac and to Jacob. And we know that that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And so the prophet is sort of encouraging the people and saying, look, you belong to God. And before we go any further tonight, if you're a believer, remember that, please.

You belong to God. You are more important to God than anybody else or anything else in the whole wide world.

God is building his people. His people are his inheritance. That's what the word tells us. His people. That is what it's all ultimately about.

The world doesn't think like that. The world thinks it's about themselves. The world thinks it's about himself or herself. But God says, no, it's about me and about my people.

[5 : 28] And the Lord is building his church. We often say it, the history of this world is a scaffolding around the church. And the church alone is what is precious.

It's at the very center of God's purposes in this world. And so we must encourage ourselves with these things because that's what the Lord is saying. You are precious.

You are important. You belong to me. And God is actually, through the prophet, he is showing how history and the future, or what we would term history now, but how the future is under his control.

Because there's going to come a king. We know how Babylon became the great reigning world power. And after them, there was the Persian, the Medes and the Persians dominated.

And the Lord, through the prophet, is actually naming the king, Cyrus, who is going to be the instrument in God's hand for the rebuilding or for permitting or directing his people back from exile to rebuild the temple and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

[6 : 43] He actually names them long before, long, long, long before this ever took place. And this is how marvelous, how wonderful it is, and what encouragement it is to see that God is ruling.

He knows, as we said, he knows the end from the beginning. But in this chapter, that's not what we're looking at tonight, but it would be a very good study to look at the contrast between the living and through God.

And the absurdity of idol worship. Because quite a section of this chapter is given to the formation of idols.

And we see just how mad it is. God made man in his image. And man now wants to make an idol in his own image. And the Lord is showing us here how ridiculous idolatry is.

Because he's seeing there, here's this tree being cultivated, and eventually the tree is cut down.

This person cuts down the tree. Half the tree he cuts into firewood, and he cooks on it, and he roasts things on it.

[7 : 53] And the other half of the tree he turns into an idol, forming this thing, and falls down and worships it. So half of it is being burnt for cooking, and the other half is made into an idol.

And when you look at it like that, it's just, it is so utterly mad. But that's what idolatry is. Idolatry is madness. And yet it is what is so natural, sadly, to the human race.

All forms of idolatry. But then the Lord is again coming to encourage his people. And because of what is going to happen to them, and because of their sin, which is ultimately going to bring judgment, but then ultimately restoration, the Lord gives this great promise, or this great truth, where he says, I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist.

Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Now one of the great problems of our life is the problem of sin. And here we have, first of all, this word transgression, which really is a kind of, it's a, it's kind of rebellion, where there's almost like almost a willful violation of God's law.

Where there's a, where we're willfully trampling God's law underfoot. Now, there's a rebellious streak in every single one of us.

[9 : 39] Even the most good-natured, the most upstanding person that you'll meet, there is still an instinctive, natural, rebellious streak.

And that might not be, there might be people who live, and they're not rebels with regard to the law of the land. They might not be rebels in their own home. Might not be rebels at work or in school or anywhere else.

But they're rebels before God. We all are. Whether we like it or not. The instinctive nature of man and woman is rebellion against God.

And there's nothing attractive about it. You know, there are some people, and there's a, in different walks in life, I suppose the time of rebellion is when people are young.

Very often people in their teenage years, they come into the rebellious years. Not always, but there's often a wee sort of kick against authority.

[10 : 43] Some people have that kick against authority all the way through their life. And sometimes we can look at it laughingly, and there is, there's no doubt about it, sometimes society

will look at certain people and they'll say, ah, there's almost a kind of an attractiveness about some forms of rebellion.

And sometimes rebels, rebels without a cause, people, and people sometimes look at them and say, ah, well, you know, it's challenging. They sort of challenge everything.

And there might sometimes, it's built up to be not too bad a thing. But rebellion against God is a fearful thing.

And unfortunately, it is something that we are all prone to. We are, as we say, natural-born rebels. And we push God's word under our feet.

Every one of us. God's word says, this is what you do. And you say, no, that's not what I'm going to do. Now, you might not analyze it and sit down and say to yourself, right, every time, I know God's word says this, but you know what I'm going to do?

[11:55] I'm deliberately, I'm going to push that down, put it under my foot, and do my own thing. Now, we don't analyze it every time like that. But instinctively, that's what we're doing.

We're very good at closing our ears to the voice of conscience which says, hey, this is wrong. There's that instinctive voice which says to us, this is wrong.

And yet, because it's attractive, because our heart goes out to it, because it's what we want to do at this particular time, sometimes we push down the voice of conscience, we ignore God's word, and we do our own thing.

And that is part of the great problem within our life. So we have our transgression, which is rebellion against God.

But we're also told here that God not only deals with our transgressions, but also our sins. Now, again, we know that sin is where we come short, basically where we come short of the glory of God.

[13:04] Sin is any want of conformity and or transgression of the law of God. But sin is where we come short of the standards, where we come short of meeting the demands of God's law.

The illustration is often used of a person with a bow and arrows, trying to hit a target that's a distance away.

But the problem is that the arrow, there's nothing wrong maybe with the arrows, but the bow has a, the string is useless.

It's one of these loose strings that cannot be tightened. The arrow is, the bow is actually useless. And it doesn't matter how you try to work it in order to pull, it's impossible to reach the target. Every arrow that goes out is coming short all the time. And that's how we live. Because we are coming short all the time of the glory of God.

[14:11] And this is one of the most awful discoveries. It's when we come to realize that right throughout our life, we are never reaching the standard or the mark that God requires of us.

It is one of the most disconcerting things and troubling things when a soul, for the first time, realizes that they have never reached, that they have never achieved what God has required of them.

So, when we look at it this way, we say to ourselves, we're in a bad place. And we have to ask ourselves, well, what is coming short of the glory of God?

What is the glory of God? How do I know what the glory of God is? Well, glory of God is seen in many ways. In many, the heavens declare the glory of God. But one of the things that we see, or one of the descriptions of the glory of God, is in Jesus Christ.

Because we're told about Jesus Christ, that he is the express image of the Father. That he is the revelation of the glory of God.

[15:19] So, when we come to look at Jesus Christ, and measure ourselves against Jesus Christ, again, we see how far short we come.

We look at his perfection. We look at how he conducted himself, how he dealt in every situation, the sinlessness, the perfection, the beauty of Jesus.

So, you see, we come so far short. Now, if that was all we were about, then it would be despair. We would feel really, really, really down.

But it's because we can't do anything that God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into this world to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

And that is the wonder of this salvation. This is the great glory of it all. You see, God is in the business of forgiving sins.

[16:18] And so, we find as we look at our sins, sometimes, when we come to discover our sin, we look at the situation.

And it's possible for some people in here. There might be somebody in here tonight. And you know what's keeping you back? You come to church, and you want to be a Christian.

But you don't know how to deal with things because your sin is troubling. Because you may think of some, you're looking back in your life, and you're looking at a particular sin, or a few sins that are so great, so big.

And you say to yourself, you know, I feel God could forgive me most things. But I don't know if he can forgive me this. And some people torture themselves with particular things that they have said or they've done in their lives.

And some who think that God can't forgive them. And they look around, maybe in a church, and they see people and say, oh, I can see how God can forgive him and forgive her.

[17 : 31] But I don't know if he can forgive me. And some people have the idea that God came to, in that Jesus Christ came to save decent sinners. As if there is such a thing there isn't.

We are sinners, full stop. Jesus didn't come to save decent sinners. He came to save sinners. All kinds of sinners. To make them saints.

Didn't come for the righteous. He didn't come for saints. He came for sinners. In order to make them saints. And we're told in scripture that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

Not 90% or even 99.9% sin. But all sin. It doesn't matter what sin. And right throughout this world, the Lord has forgiven people who have committed every kind of sin.

But then you might be saying to yourself, oh, it's not so much a particular sin as a number of my sins. Because I never realized.

[18 : 39] But I don't know what's happened. But it's my mind, my heart has been opened. And I've realized that there's just, that in everything, I've been sinning.

I didn't know that. And so it's possible for a patient to become overwhelmed and oppressed by the number of their sins. But again, the Lord is saying to us in these words, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

And again, sometimes we can get really cast down by thinking about how we have sinned in the knowledge of light.

Where we have willfully pushed down the barriers and the restraints that God has set up to keep us from sinning. Where there is this, there's this power driving us on.

And we know that we ought not to. And yet it's like we're pulling down every restraint and every barrier to say, I'm going to sin. And then when we stop and we think, oh Lord, how could I have been like that?

[19 : 54] And we fear that the Lord could never have mercy on us because of what we have done. But this is what the Lord is saying. Here's this great truth.

I have blotted out your transgressions. This is a wonderful news. And you see, the Lord is keeping a story of our life. And while on one hand that can be upsetting, on the other hand, it's wonderful to know.

Because it means that when the time comes for the books to be opened, there won't be anything anywhere about us that won't have been dealt with by the blood of Jesus Christ.

You see, a lot of people keep a diary. I don't mean keeping a diary of future events, of places and appointments you have to keep. But of recording your life.

It was something that a lot of people in the past used to do. Keep a diary of their life. And you know, there was a period in my life I used to love reading people's diaries or the accounts of their life.

[21 : 00] But what I used to find often when I would read, I would say, well, what remarkable people they were. Weren't they good? But you see, the problem is that very often in writing the story of your life, it can be selective.

Sometimes you might write about the challenges and some difficult things. But I can't imagine anybody writing the story of their life. And writing down, giving an account of all the murderous, wicked, lustful, proud thoughts that they've had day by day, recording these things.

You know, if we were to read that part of the story of anybody's life, we would say, well, my word, aren't they wicked?

But that's the story of our life too. And that's the story that God records. He records everything.

There's nothing hidden. And every single iota of our words, of our deeds, of our thoughts are recorded.

And one day the books will be opened. And there will be a completely accurate account of our life. But you know that this is what the Lord now is saying, and this is a wonderful thing.

[22 : 22] He says, I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud. And the idea is to wipe the slate clean. It's like if you were writing on a slate with a white chalk.

And whether you've written or whether you've drawn. And then you get a wet cloth. And you wipe it all away. And there is not the least trace or sign of anything that you have written.

That's what they used to do long ago on the leather scrolls. They would get a sponge and they would wash away what was written. That's what the Lord is saying. That's what I'm going to do for you.

I'm going to wash, wipe out, blot it, remove it, eradicate it, erase it. There will be no sight whatever of it.

And he's saying there, I will blot out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist. You and I, it's like the idea sometimes you can come up in a morning and there's this thick mist.

[23 : 29] And you're almost away behind the thick mist of these dark, dark clouds. It's a heavy kind of day. But as the day progresses gradually, that mist rises.

And eventually these black clouds go away. And a day before, maybe by midday, it's beautiful. The sun is shining. Clear blue sky.

It's lovely and warm. And the Lord is saying, that's how it's going to be. I'm going to eradicate, remove, take away these things.

So that it's like the sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings. It's a beautiful thought, a beautiful picture. And all the sins washed away.

And the Lord then says, return to me, for I have redeemed you. And this is how the Lord has washed away our sin. Because we have been, to be redeemed is to buy back.

[24 : 34] And that's what happened when we were, we lost everything in the fall. Everything. Everything we had, it was lost. And that's what Jesus Christ has done.

And that's why Jesus is termed the Redeemer. Because he has come to redeem, to buy back. And how did he buy back? He bought back by paying with his own life.

His blood. His life. He was a cost. That's why it says in Isaiah, I owe everyone that thirsteth. Come unto me. And you don't, without money and without price.

Why? Because the price has all been paid. Jesus has paid. That's why he is the ransom. He is the Redeemer. That's why he is termed the Redeemer.

Is he your Redeemer tonight? If not, why not? I'm sure there are people in here who have heard this gospel for many, many years.

[25 : 39] See how it finishes here. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Return to me. You know, sometimes when you're away or you're out, and then you say to yourself after a while, it's time to go home.

You know, you've always got to, in the end, go home. Time to go home. You know, in a sense, that's what God is saying to us all tonight. It's time to go home.

And he's saying it, he's saying it to you tonight who are outside. It's time to come home. You have heard this gospel so often.

Jesus has been held up before you so often. And sometimes you have to say, dear, what more can be done? How can Jesus be impressed upon you anymore?

Will you hear God's word where Jesus is saying, and here's this word, return to me. You have gone far enough for long enough.

[26 : 47] It's time to come back. The door is open. The provision has been made. It's time to come home. Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we ask you.