

The Sinner's Dilemma and God's Solution

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] If you're using the psalm books, page 126. Psalm 96a, verses 1 to 9, the tune is Richmond. O sing a new song to the Lord, sing praises to his name, and his salvation day by day let all the earth proclaim.

His glory and his mighty deeds to every land declare, how great and awesome is the Lord, with him no gods compare. That's Psalm 96a, page 126, and we'll stand to sing.

O sing a new song to the Lord, sing praises to his name, and his salvation day by day let all the earth proclaim.

His glory and his mighty deeds to every land declare, How great and awesome is the Lord, with him no gods compare.

For other gods are wood and stone, the Lord made heaven's height.

[1 : 51] All power and majesty at his, he dwells in glorious light.

All nations to the Lord, ascribe the glory that is true.

Glory and strength ascribe to God, and praise his name on you.

Enter his courts with joy and bring an offering with you.

Worship the Lord in holy day, all earth before him bow.

[3 : 12] Let's call upon the Lord now in prayer. Let's all join together in prayer. Our gracious and holy God, you have called us into your presence today to worship you.

And we give thanks that through the words we have been singing, we are reminded of your worthiness that we should worship you. Reminded, O Lord, of how much you deserve our worship at all times.

And you describe yourself throughout your word as a God who is great and glorious and holy and majestic and mighty. A God full of grace and compassion, but also whose wrath burns against sin. We thank you, Lord, today for this opportunity. We pray that you would help us to appreciate it for what it is. For we come to have an audience with the King of heaven.

We are able to come into your presence through Jesus Christ, your Son. We bless you today, Lord, for that privilege. We pray that we may never lose sight of how precious it is to your people.

[4 : 24] Of how wondrous a thing it is that we should come into the presence of God and find that we are made acceptable in your beloved Son. Lord, we thank you today that your invitation through the gospel reaches out to the whole world.

And we thank you, Lord, that there is no prejudice with you. Whatever our background may be, whatever our past may be, whatever may be true of us in the present, we give thanks, Lord, that we are welcome as we come in the spirit of the fear of God.

As we bow before you in repentance and in faith, so we are assured, Lord, that you will receive us. And we thank you today that you are true to your word at all times.

A God who is to be trusted. God who is dependable. One who is foundational to his people and will always carry them in his steadfastness and in his commitment to his promises.

We thank you today, Lord, for all that you have been to us throughout the course of life. For the way that you continue to watch over us and maintain us from day to day.

[5 : 35] For the way you uphold us and indeed for the way you uphold the whole of your creation. For we know that it is upheld by you, even though so many people in the world do not recognize you or wish to know you.

We thank you, Lord, that as you have created all things for your glory, so you will bring all things to pass that you have promised. We pray that you would help us to hold on to these great and precious truths.

Whenever our own lives are affected, so as we find a measure of disquiet or anxiety or upheaval in the course of life.

Help us to look to you, O Lord, to your steadfastness. Help us to find our confidence in your throne, in your rule, in your perfect rule, in your will for us, in Jesus Christ.

Enable us especially to enter more fully into the enjoyment of that salvation that you have brought to us in him. So bless us, we pray here today as a congregation.

[6 : 41] Lord, we ask that each of us here will know your presence for ourselves and that we may not rest with the mere fact of being here or formally worshipping you.

Help us, we pray, to look to you and to seek that spiritual satisfaction of soul that comes from knowing you, coming from drawing near to you, and knowing that we meet with your approval. We come before you, Lord, to confess our sins. We know that, Lord, we sin against you every day we live, that we sin against you in different ways, in our very thoughts inwardly, which may be seen and unknown to anyone else.

Yet we know that you read our hearts and that you read our hearts in such a way as takes note of all that we think and all that we say and all that we do. And we thank you, Lord, as we come to express our sin and our sorrow for our sins.

As we repent of our sin, we give thanks that we meet with your mercy, a God who has declared himself to be merciful and who has made such abundant provision for us in the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we can know that forgiveness of sins in his name that you are pleased to bestow.

[8 : 00] Lord, help us, we pray, each one of us here to know of that forgiveness for ourselves and to appreciate it in such a way as would commend it to our fellow human beings in this world.

Particularly, we remember today, Lord, the many people who are not in church and don't care to be in church services, who don't want to worship you, who even are hostile to you.

O let your gospel, we pray, and the power of your spirit come to rest upon us as a people in our communities, in our homes and families. Bless us, we pray, to that end.

Bless our young people and our children. Bless them here today. Bless them in our homes, in our family circles. Bless them in school. Bless them in all the ways, O Lord, in which they need your guidance through life.

Guide and protect them, we pray, in days when so much confronts them that would seek to lead them away from the things of God and from your gospel, from the Lord Jesus Christ and from placing their faith in him.

[9 : 06] Lord, protect them, we pray, and help them as they learn about these things at home and in Sunday school and in church. Help them to hold on to them as precious truths for themselves, that they may indeed build up their lives in faith and in hope and help them, Lord, to be encouraged in the ways of God.

Remember those today of our number who miss loved ones, who have been taken from the scene of time, whether in times past or in recent times, Lord, we pray that your blessing will be with all the bereaved today and ask that the mourning hearts will be consoled and comforted by yourself.

And we commend them to you and to the strength of your grace and ask that you would do for them exceeding abundantly, even above what they're able to ask or think. Remember as we pray as a congregation, as we seek to move forward from these difficult times due to the COVID pandemic, we give thanks, Lord, for the way in which we find a greater measure of freedom and of advancement.

And we pray that that will continue. And help us, we pray, to reflect upon all that has happened over these past years in such a way as would turn our hearts to wisdom and make us wise unto salvation.

We ask, too, your blessing, Lord, as we anticipate shortly the presbytery coming to hear Mr. Smith's response to our call to be our assistant pastor.

[10 : 39] We pray that you'd bless him and his family and bless his congregation in North U.S. at this time as they look to his decision. We pray that you'd grant us, Lord, that we wait upon yourself.

And we pray that as the days and weeks go by that you would lead us and guide us and bless us meantime under the gospel. So hear us, we pray now, and continue to watch over us and to guide us in life.

And all we ask is in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Okay, a word now to the children. It's good to see you here today, children.

I know you've got a short holiday at this time, so it's really good that you're able to come to church. There's a name in the Bible I want you to remember today.

It's found in the Old Testament and it's in the book of Jeremiah, especially in chapters 38 and 39. And that name is Ebed-Melech.

[11 : 43] It's the name of a man who was a servant of King Zedekiah at that time. His name was Ebed-Melech. It's quite easy to remember the two names.

There are two Hebrew words. Ebed is the Hebrew word for servant or slave. Melech is the Hebrew word for king. So his name literally means servant of the king.

Ebed-Melech. I'm going to read a few words in Jeremiah chapter 38 just so we can find out something about this man. When Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern, this was a large pit that his enemies had put him into, the king was sitting in the Benjamin gate.

Ebed-Melech went from the king's house and said to the king, My lord, the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.

Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian, take three men with you from here and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies. So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king to a wardrobe in the storehouse and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes.

[13 : 08] Then Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian, said to Jeremiah, Put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes. And Jeremiah did so. And when they drew Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern, and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

Now a number of things in that passage about Ebed-Melech as well as Jeremiah are very interesting. First of all, we're told that he was an Ethiopian.

You know where Ethiopia is? Ethiopia is in Africa, so Ebed-Melech was almost certainly a black man, a man with the black skin, who was a servant of King Zedekiah.

And that reminds us that God does not have any prejudice against the color of our skin. Some human beings sadly do that when they think of people of a different color and that they're inferior or different to themselves and not as good as themselves.

The Bible doesn't allow us to think that way. We hear a lot in our days of racism, and racism is bad. We must never think badly of anyone just because they happen to differ from us in anything at all, especially in the color of their skin.

[14 : 25] So this man, an Ethiopian, Ebed-Melech was an Ethiopian, as mentioned twice in the passage, that he was an Ethiopian. But he was a servant of the king.

In other words, it doesn't mean that what kind of color of skin we've got prevents us from being in a place of importance. He had a place of importance in the service of King Zedekiah.

And as we said, his name, Ebed-Melech, means in Hebrew, servant of the king. And that too is a reminder to ourselves that it's important when we think of these words, what Christians are, you could say that every Christian is an Ebed-Melech.

He's a servant of King Jesus. And it doesn't matter what our background is or what age we're at, for all you children today, it doesn't matter that your children, you can still be and should be, and I hope you are, Ebed-Melechs, that you're servants of the king, servants of Jesus.

Whenever we come to Jesus, whatever our background is, as we come to trust in Jesus, we are told in the Bible that he will accept us, that he will never cast us out.

[15 : 41] But Ebed-Melech was also a man of God. We're told in the next chapter that when the end of the reign of Zedekiah came, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's people, the Babylonians, that Ebed-Melech didn't die, though many people in Jerusalem died, sadly.

He was protected by God because he had served God. And that's what we read there in chapter 39. I will surely save you, God said to him, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize because you have put your trust in me, declares the Lord.

And for us today, as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ, as we put our trust in him, that's what God assures us of. When the world comes to an end, when the day of judgment comes as it will, we are told we will not die.

We will not end up lost. We will not be cast off with the wicked. We will be saved and safe because we have come to trust in the Lord.

And so that's why Jeremiah was rescued because Ebed-Melech went to the king and said to the king that these people who had put Jeremiah in the pit, those who were his enemies, they had done an evil thing to him.

[17:06] And the king gave orders, as we read, for Ebed-Melech to actually go and take some men with him and lift Jeremiah out of the pit. And you see how kind he was and how considerate he was.

He actually took some, as we read, some rags and some old clothes so that he put them, Jeremiah could put them under his arms. The pit wasn't full of water, but there was a lot of mud in it.

And he was probably really stuck in the mud. When you would lift him up, it would be quite sore unless he had something under his arms. And that's why Ebed-Melech thought about that.

He even thought about such a detail as that to actually make things as comfortable as possible for Jeremiah. And all who are servants of Jesus, all who are Ebed-Melechs, always think, what can I do to help people?

What can I do to actually make things easier for those who have problems in their own lives? So remember this word, Ebed-Melech, servant of the king.

[18:10] And be yourself an Ebed-Melech, a servant of King Jesus. We're going to say the Lord's Prayer together. Let's say the Lord's Prayer.

Amen. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

Amen. Now we're going to read from God's Word again. This time we're going to read in Isaiah chapter 6, and some verses from Luke's Gospel chapter 5.

First of all, Isaiah chapter 6, and reading verses 1 to 8. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

[19:26] Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongues from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I, send me.

And if we turn to the New Testament, to Luke chapter 5, reading some verses there, from the beginning, verses 1 to 11. Luke 5, at the beginning, on one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.

[21:01] And he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land.

And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing.

But at your word, I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken. And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who had partners with Simon. And Jesus said to

Simon, Do not be afraid.

[22 : 06] From now on you will be catching men. And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. Amen. May God bless to us these readings of his word.

Let's sing further to his praise, this time in Psalm 51. Psalm 51 in the Scottish Psalter. That's on page 280. Sing to the tune, Martyrdom, and verses 1 to 7.

After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me. For thy compassions great blot out all mine iniquity. Me cleanse from sin and throughly wash from mine iniquity.

For my transgressions, I confess my sin I ever see. We'll go on down to verse 7 from the beginning. After thy loving kindness. After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me.

For thy compassion, for thy compassion's great blot out all mine iniquity.

[23 : 31] Me cleanse from sin and throughly wash from mine iniquity.

For my transgressions, I confess my sin I ever see.

Against thee, Against thee, thee only have I sent In thy sight done this hell, That when thou speaks, Thou mayst be just And clear in judging still.

Behold, I in Iniquity was formed For the womb within.

My mother also me conceived In guiltiness and sin.

[25 : 16] In guiltiness and sin. Behold, thou in the inward parts, With true delight, And wisdom thou shalt make me know Within the hidden part.

Do thou with his offspring kill me, I shall be cleansed soul, Yea, wash thou me, And then I shall be whiter than the snow.

So, Would that you please turn to Isaiah chapter 6 with me? We're going to look at these verses In chapter 6 of Isaiah, Verses 1 to 8 especially.

In verse 5 we read Isaiah's response In response to the vision that he had of God. And I said, Woe is me for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips.

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts. Now this is an account, In Isaiah's own words, Of his commissioning.

[27 : 15] His commissioning, as it were, To be a prophet of God, To be a spokesman for God, Which the prophets were, To his own people at that time. And the passage, Although it's specifically about Isaiah, And about Isaiah's commissioning to be a prophet, There is so much in it that teaches ourselves Some very necessary truths about ourselves And about God, And especially about the relation between us and God.

And we're calling our study, The Sinner's Dilemma and God's Solution. Because both of these, Have to be held together by us, In our thoughts, As they are held together side by side, In the Gospel, in the Bible.

The Sinner's Dilemma, What is true of us as sinners, The dilemma that is ours, The plight that is ours, But alongside of that, You actually have God's provision, Exactly to meet our need, In the dilemma that we face.

Now this was a time of great instability in Judah. The instability was caused by a great movement of empires, Assyrian Empire, Assyrian Empire was beginning to flex its muscles.

One of the kings, one of the famous kings, Tiglath-Pileser III, Was really beginning to expand his horizons, as it were, In trying to expand the Assyrian influence in the world.

[28 : 49] And that left a lot of instability and uncertainty, In places like Judah and Jerusalem. You can see that in the books of Kings and Chronicles, As well as in the prophecy of Isaiah particularly.

And in these uncertain times, In this passage, Isaiah brings us certain contrasts and certain comparisons, Which were very meaningful to himself, And are very meaningful to us at all times.

He contrasts, for example, The king, Uzziah, The king of Judah, The year that he died. He contrasts that reference to the death of this earthly king, To the sight that he had of the heavenly king of the Lord.

The Lord, the king on his throne. And he says here in the passage, He saw the Lord high and lifted up, Sitting upon a throne, High and lifted up.

And his garment, his robe filled the temple, And his vision that Isaiah had. So there's that contrast between the earthly king, Uzziah, And the living God, the king of heaven.

[30 : 01] And that contrast, of course, is important, Because the earthly throne, Which is in its own way so unstable and uncertain, And can so easily be overthrown by another throne, The likes of the Assyrian.

Well, that's contrasted with the stability of God's throne. And you know that's something that always follows into our experience as human beings, whatever generation we belong to.

The principles of this passage, and this particular emphasis, this contrast, contrast follows through into the world, into the world in which you and I live today. Because as you well know, we face times of instability.

Indeed, most of the times in the history of the world, and in some way or other unstable and uncertain. And you only have to listen to the news, and look out at what's happening in the world. And you find expansionism.

You find Putin seeking to flex his muscles, seeking to expand his influence. And that's what's happening in that part of the world, as you very well know, to the detriment very much of the people of Ukraine.

[31 : 05] And in that situation, in that circumstance, in the world of our day, as you look at these unstable thrones, and uncertain thrones, you look upwards to the throne of heaven.

Nothing has changed there. Nothing has become unstable there. There's nothing uncertain about the reign of God. Whatever it is we see happening in the world.

So we're going to look at this under three headings. First of all, the problem of being a sinner. Focusing on these words in verse 5. And then secondly, the provision that God has made for sinners, in verses 6 and 7.

And then thirdly, the proposal that God puts to save sinners, to be his servants, as we said to the children earlier, to be ebed melechs, to be servants of the king, of the king of heaven.

The problem, first of all, of being a sinner. What is my greatest problem in being a sinner? What makes my problem so great, that I am actually a sinner?

[32 : 11] That you are a sinner? That we know ourselves to be sinners, as described in the word of God. Is the biggest problem the state of my heart? Is my own condition the biggest problem?

Is what I find in myself the biggest problem? When I ask, what is the biggest problem in being a sinner? Well, it's not. My biggest problem in being a sinner, is that I am a sinner in the presence of a holy God.

That's my big problem. That's not what I am in myself merely, although, of course, that's at the heart of the problem too. But it's what I am in relation to God. It's what I am in relation to my creator. It's what I am in relation to God, the judge of all the earth. That is what Isaiah's dilemma is, as he sees the Lord high, and lifted up on this throne. He sees and hears about this holy God.

This God who is the enemy of sin. This God who detests sin. This God who cannot stand to look upon sin, and with approval for a moment.

[33 : 12] That is why he is saying what he is saying in verse 5. That's his big problem. That he has to deal with, and appear before this holy God. Now you see how he is described in verse 3, by the seraphim, these heavenly beings, that surrounded the throne of heaven.

One said to another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. Three times the word holy is used. It's a super superlative, if you like.

It's really the only way that an attempt can be made to describe what God is like. He is not just holy. He is holy, holy, holy. He is intensely holy.

He is perfectly holy. And while it's difficult for us, and it's impossible for us to appreciate what perfect holiness is, this is what is true of God. This is why Isaiah has such a dilemma.

Because he is dealing with a God who is holy. He is separate. He is there apart from sinners. He is apart from everything he has created. Although we know that God comes near to us, and we will see in the provision God has made, in the gospel, God has come near to us in Jesus Christ, and brings us salvation and a remedy in Jesus Christ.

[34 : 31] In himself, God, this thrice holy God, this holy, holy, holy God, is the God you and I have to deal with. That's what makes my sin so serious. That's what makes your sin so serious.

That's what makes being a sinner such a serious matter. The only way that sin cannot be serious, is if you're not serious about God. And if you're not serious about the holiness of God, then sin really becomes much smaller than it ought to be in our conception and our view of it.

But once you actually see and appreciate what God is like, indeed, what Jesus is like as well.

Because Jesus, of course, the Son of God, being himself God, he came into this world to reveal God to us.

And what you see in Jesus is what is true of God. Holiness in perfection. This thrice holy God.

You remember the passage we read about Peter in Luke chapter 5, Where that miraculous catch of fish took place. Here were these experienced fishermen.

[35 : 40] They had spent all night the best time fishing. They had spent all night toiling, laboring, Out at sea fishing and caught nothing. And here was Jesus saying to them in the height of day, Take your boats, go out into the deep, let your nets down for a catch.

And this is Peter's reaction. And it's not surprising he's got this reaction. We have toiled all night and caught nothing. So, he's really saying, Well, we don't expect that it's going to be different this time. But at your word, I will let down the net. And you see, there's, just in passing, let me say this. There's such a lesson in that itself, isn't there? Because here is something that goes against Peter's expectation.

Indeed, against Peter's previous experience. But because it's the Lord who's saying it, he'll go along with it. He'll obey it. And for you and for me, that's so important. It doesn't matter what we've known in the past.

It doesn't matter what we think might or might not expect. Whatever the Lord says to us, whatever the Lord's word says to us, whatever God is specifying for us, that's what he will have us to do.

[36 : 44] Without questioning his wisdom or his providence. And so, what was Peter's reaction when he saw you? He marveled, as the others did, at this great catch of fish.

He said, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. You see, that's what took hold of his mind. He didn't say, depart from me, for I am a small man, O Lord.

For I am a weak man. For I don't have such power as this, O Lord. That's not what really grabbed his attention. What really caught him in his mind was this. In the presence of this Savior, this person, this Jesus, who had demonstrated not only his power, but his holiness in this great catch of fish.

Depart from me. Put a distance between me and you, Lord. I am not worthy to be in your presence, for I am a sinful man. You know, when the Lord reveals himself to you, one of your immediate reactions is, Lord, I certainly don't deserve to be anywhere near you.

Because I am a sinful person. And you are holy. And I have no business being in your presence, because you are holy. And this is what Isaiah is saying.

[38 : 02] That he is such a sinful person. In the presence of this holy God, look what he is saying here in verse 5. Woe is me, for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips.

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. You see what he is focusing on?

He has seen the Lord of hosts in his vision of God on his throne. How do you come to really appreciate your own sinfulness?

How do you come to believe for certain in your sinfulness, in your sinnership? Well, of course, you come to believe in it because God's word says it to you. Because you know that is what the teaching of God's word is.

But how do you really come to appreciate it deep in your soul? How does your soul come to be moved in appreciation of your sinfulness?

[39 : 02] When you come to experience the holiness of God, that's when. Because when you come even in a small measure to appreciate that God is holy.

That the holy God is speaking to you. That the holy God is the one that you need to face up to and meet with and deal with. Well, it's then you see that you see your sin for what it is.

The more you come to see the holiness of God, the greater your appreciation of your sinfulness will be. And it's not that we need to have a massive appreciation or understanding of our sinfulness before we can appreciate God's salvation in Christ.

But it does mean in a measure that we need to come to know God and our own selves in his presence. And this is what happens. And you can only appreciate the cross of Christ and the death of Christ when you come to appreciate this.

The holiness of God, as you come to appreciate your own sinfulness in the light of that. Then you move to the cross of Christ, the death of Jesus. And you ask yourself, well, why did Jesus die?

[40 : 17] Why did he have to die the death of the cross? Why did all this have to happen to him, this perfect sinless son of God? And the only answer to that that really is adequate is the fact that it had to be the case because of what we were.

And what we are. And what God is in his holiness. It's when you accept your own sinfulness in the light of God's holiness that then you begin to understand what is true about the cross of Christ. Why he needed to die that death. Because it's the death you and I deserved. And he chose to take that to himself. The holy God providing for us, as we'll see in a moment.

Well, there's the holiness of God, the holy God and the sinful person that Isaiah is confessing himself to be. And notice what he's saying. Woe is me for I am lost.

I am undone. For I am a man of unclean lips. Now, what does he focus on the unclean lips? Well, because he was going to be a prophet of God speaking for God. He needed to present God accurately and properly to people.

[41 : 34] So he needed to have clean speech. His mouth needed to be clean. His words needed to be words that fit it with the message that he was presenting.

But again, we can take that to ourselves and apply it, even though we're not going to be prophets like Isaiah was. Because it's our speech that really betrays very largely what's in our hearts, isn't it? If we didn't speak, if we didn't have to speak, if it wasn't for our language, for the words that we use, the thoughts of our mind, the thoughts of our heart would not come forth.

And that's what Jesus said on one occasion in Matthew chapter 10, I think it is, when he said to the disciples, It's not what goes into a person that defiles the Pharisees were complaining that the disciples had not washed their hands before they had eaten.

And Jesus said, that's not what defiles a person to eat with unwashed hands. He's suggesting that it was a good thing to eat without washing their hands. But what he's saying is, what really defiles a person, morally and spiritually, is what's in their heart.

[42 : 45] For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, uncleanness. It's our mouth, our lips, our language, our speaking that reveals what's in our hearts.

And so often you find that the case in the Bible. And that's why Isaiah is saying, woe is me, for I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips. I have a sinful heart. And it comes through in my lips.

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And you see, he's not making excuses for himself. He's not saying, well, it's the people's fault. They're unclean people. They're sinful people. No, he's saying, I am what I am. And I'm part of this sinful people. And woe is me. For I am undone. I am lost. Now, you mustn't think for a moment. Isaiah didn't mean that. Or that he was exaggerating. That somehow or other he was just going beyond what was necessary to say.

[43 : 56] This is exactly what he thought. This is exactly what he believed. Because when the holy God reveals himself to you and to me.

And when he reveals our sin to us. And when our sin comes to the fore. And when we're struck by our sinfulness in the presence of such a holy God. Your immediate reaction should be and mine should be.

Unless God does something to provide for this. I am lost. I am undone. There is no way out of this for me. I mean, Isaiah is really beginning to disintegrate.

In the presence of God for that moment. That he's contemplating himself as a sinner in the presence of this holy God. And of course, thankfully. There is a provision made by God.

But that's how you and I should feel. That's how you and I should conclude. Should think. About ourselves and our sinfulness.

[44 : 56] The problem of being a sinner. And it's a huge problem. We're going to make the answer to it in a minute. But the problem of being a sinner is not just for I am in myself. But it's meeting the moral majesty of God.

The holiness of God. The God with whom I have to do. And you know, in Isaiah. You find that frequently. If you go back to the very beginning of Isaiah. And it's a great promise.

In chapter 18. God is saying, come now. He's speaking to the people as a whole. As a sinful people. Let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet. They shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson. They shall become like wool. And in a vision of Isaiah 6. What Isaiah is really coming to appreciate. Is that every fiber of his being.

Is stained red with sin. And yet. Here's the wonder of it all. When you think of. A fleece.

[45 : 56] The fleece. That comes off a sheep's back. If you think of that fleece. Every fiber of it. Dyed red with crimson color.

Imagine the difficulty. Indeed. The impossibility. Of taking all of that dye. Out of every single one. Of those fibers. But that's what God is saying.

In verse 18 of chapter 1. Though your sins. Be like scarlet. Though they are crimson red. They shall be white as wool. They shall be completely washed away.

Because secondly. The problem of being a sinner. You have the provision. God has made. One of the seraphim. Flew to me.

Having in his hand. A burning coal. That he had taken with tongs. From the altar. He touched my mouth. And said. Behold. This has touched your lips. Your guilt. Is taken away.

[46 : 56] In other words. I say. I saw. An altar. Sacrifice. A provision made. For his sin. God himself. I mean. Provided that. And one of the seraph.

Took a coal. A live coal. A burning coal. With tongs. From the altar. Here is. Really. Our great. Comfort today.

When our sin. Makes us so uncomfortable. And rightly so. When in the presence of God. We learn something. Of what it's like. To be a sinner. And of the dilemma.

Of being a sinner. When you turn to the gospel. When you turn to the message. That God has in his word. He says to you. Not only. Are you a sinner. And are really in a dilemma.

But I have a solution. For you. I have a remedy. For it. I have actually. Got it ready. I've done it. I've prepared it. It's here for you.

[47 : 53] You see. He's saying. He took this burning coal. With tongs on the altar. And he touched my mouth. And said. Behold. This has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. And your sin atoned for.

And you put that beside. The confession that Isaiah made. A man of unclean lips. And living among a people. Of unclean lips. And here is. God's remedy. God's provision.

And it comes to meet. His need. Exactly. Doesn't it? That touches him. On the lips. That Isaiah had confessed. To be sinful lips. There's the wonder of the gospel.

There's the wonder of Jesus. There's the wonder of God's provision. In the atonement. In the sacrifice. Of Jesus. In his death. What is it for? Who is it for? What does it meet?

It meets your need. And it meets my need. Exactly. Whatever. Our need may be. And however difficult it is. For us to describe it. Or to appreciate it all. God knows. He knows every single fiber of your being.

[48 : 49] He knows everything that's necessary to be done. In order to wash you. And make you clean. In order to take your sin. And your guilt away. He's provided that. In the atoning sacrifice.

And the death of Jesus. But he comes to apply that. Through the Holy Spirit. Taking what Jesus has done. And applying it to our souls. Applying it to our lives. There isn't any body in here today.

Whatever. However great the variety of our need may be. And however much we may vary. As to how we see our need. And whatever our backgrounds may be. God is assuring you today.

The multiplicity of your needs as a sinner. Are all taken account of. In the wonderful. Atoning death of Christ.

Nobody needs to leave this building today. Saying woe is me. I am undone. There is no remedy for me. Nobody needs to leave this building today.

[49 : 49] Unsaved. When you realize the abundant. Relevant. Particular provision. That God has made for you. The sinner. And for me. The sinner. The death of Jesus.

Exactly matches. What you and I need. The person of Jesus. Exactly matches. What you and I need today.

To be saved. It corresponds to it. Exactly. And God said to him. Behold this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. And your sin. Atoned for. You know we all have. A record. In the presence of God. God. The record book of God.

Is always accurate. Never exaggerates. It's never wrong. And when you and I come. To think of ourselves. As sinful people.

[50 : 53] And think of the record. That God has in heaven. Against us. And about us. For our sins. Its pages are full. Full. Of details.

That condemn us. But then you see. You come. To God's forgiveness. To the salvation.

That is in Jesus. To the application. Of what Jesus has done. On the cross. And in his resurrection. To our lives. And then you look. At the record books.

In heaven. And there's no sign. Of the sins. That condemned you. They've been washed away. They've been cleaned away. They no longer appear. In the records of God.

And instead. Of the details. That condemned us. As we are in ourselves. As sinners. Instead of that. You find. The righteousness. Of Christ.

[51 : 48] And when you find. The righteousness. Of Christ. Well obviously. You find God's approval. Of you. As a person. That's the result.

Of God's applying to us. What Jesus has done. The plight of a sinner. The sinner's dilemma. And God's solution. That's really the essence.

Of the gospel. You wouldn't expect me today. To stand in this pulpit. And say. You don't really need to worry. Because the Bible. Actually exaggerates sin. And we've come to learn.

Since the Bible. Was written. That we don't need to think. About ourselves. The way they thought about it then. Things aren't really as serious. As you might make out. And actually. There's no such thing.

In God. As anger. Anyway. We found out. Since those days. That we don't need to think of God. In these terms. God is love. God is kind. God is compassionate. Of course.

[52 : 45] God is all of that. But he's not changed. From what he was. When the Bible was written. B.B. Warfield. In one of his. Books.

In one of his essays. He was dealing with the idea. That people had. That God is love. Is really pretty much. All we need to know. About God. And that because God is love.

There's no such thing. As anger in God. There's no such thing. As wrath against sin. There's no such thing. In the death of Jesus. As propitiation.

Something that deals. With the wrath of God. And pacifies. If you like. The wrath of God. Well. This is what. B.B. Warfield said. Yes.

He said. God is love. But love is not God. God. And the formula. Love. Must therefore. Ever be inadequate.

[53 : 43] To express God. By that he meant. That God is love. But he's much more than love. He has other things. Along with love. This is how he finished.

It is the distinguishing characteristic. Of Christianity. After all. Not that it preaches. A God of love. But that it preaches. A God of conscience.

He didn't mean by that. That the preaching of the gospel. Does not emphasize. That God is love. Woe be to me. If I don't emphasize that. Because God is love.

And it's in his love. That he's provided. The death of Jesus. For me. As a sinner. But I also have to appreciate. That if I don't trust in Christ. The love of God.

Is not going to save me. Although God is love. Because God is angry with me. For my sins. And I need to turn to Jesus. And to know God's forgiveness.

[54 : 40] For that to change. And so we come today. To trust in Christ. And as we trust in Christ.

To trust in this God. We realize something amazing. That this holy God. Has himself in love.

Provided the death of Jesus. For us. To deal with his own wrath. Isn't that amazing? It's not that.

The death of Jesus. Changed God. From being a wrathful God. To being a God of nothing but love. But it is. It is the fact that God. Who does burn in his wrath against sin.

Chose himself in his love. To provide for sinners. So that they need not die. And he did so. In the wonder of the cross. The provision.

[55 : 39] That God has made. For sinners. And we finish. With what he said here. To Isaiah. The voice of the Lord. Saying whom shall I send. Who will go for us.

Then I said. Here am I. Send me. The problem of being a sinner. Provision God has made. For sinners.

The proposal God puts. To save sinners. Here's the question Isaiah heard. Who am I going to send? And God is saying.

Who's going to deliver this message from me. To these people. And Isaiah's immediate response is. Here I am. Send me. Isn't that amazing in itself. That that actually grew.

Out of this amazing vision. That he had of God. You might think. And I might think. It would be the other way about. If you saw this God. As he saw him. In his holiness. And had this reaction. As he had to that holiness.

[56 : 34] Woe is me. For I am undone. For I am lost. And then had this provision. Of God. You might think. Well. I am certainly not fit. To serve this God. And it is just too awesome for me.

It is far too much. I just can't take any such. Such thing as that on in my life. You see. It is the very opposite. Because as you appreciate. God's forgiveness.

