

Isaiah 1:2

by Gerry Covenhoven

God's sermon to his people is a call for them to recognize their rebellion against him and to return to him, and it is a reminder of the consequences of sin and the need for repentance.

Duration: 37:13

Scripture: Isaiah 1:16-19, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Sin And Consequences", "Salvation Through Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the spiritual condition of the people and the consequences of their sins. He emphasizes that both the intellect and the will of the people are disconnected from God, leading to their need for chastening. The preacher shares a personal anecdote about a friend's brother who thought sin was worth it, but highlights that sin is not worth the consequences. The sermon also emphasizes the importance of making a decision to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior for forgiveness and transformation. The preacher warns that failing to make this decision will result in judgment. The sermon concludes by challenging listeners to examine their own relationship with God and to not neglect walking with Him.

Transcript

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib.

But Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Our simple nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger.

They are gone away backwards. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more, and the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.

They have not been clothed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Verse 10. Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom.

Give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of set beasts, and I

delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of eagles. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread or to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations.

Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths and calling of assemblies I cannot away with. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. They are a trouble unto me. I am weary to bear them.

When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

Wash you, make you clean. Put away the evil of your doing from before my eyes. Teach to do evil, learn to do well.

Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.

But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." You have in this book the writing of one of the great prophets of the 8th century. A prophet whom God raised up in Israel to speak to the people concerning their condition.

A prophet who had access to the palace. He was able to be at home with both the king and the nobility and the common people. He knew the pulse of the nation.

He knew the way things were going. And he knew the tremendous lack that there was amongst these people who called themselves the people of God. I think this is a tremendous parallel between these people that in those days called themselves the people of God and people who today call themselves the people of God, or Christians, shall I say, using that term in its broad sense.

Here, I believe, Isaiah registers for us the disappointment of God in his people. How God felt right to the very innermost part of his soul a disappointment in these people whom he had saved, whom he had brought into a relationship to himself, having taken them out of Egypt, bringing them into the land of Canaan, introducing them into abundant blessings, and then they, instead of responding in kind, came away from him. There are many beautiful words in the book of Isaiah.

I think it's one of the most beautiful books of the Old Testament. And yet, in the words that Isaiah writes, we find some words that are not at all beautiful. This chapter that we've read, the portions of it, we have noticed that Isaiah is constrained to speak some very severe things, and to speak of conditions that were certainly repugnant, repugnant as Isaiah describes them, and yet his intention and desire is that these people would truly participate in the beauty that God desired to convey to them, that they might experience a transformed life, that they might manifest the nature of God in their lives.

This is God's purpose for people down through the ages. He desires to enter into our lives, through his salvation, and transform our lives in order that our lives might truly be beautiful in every way. I think that as we read these words written approximately 2,700 years ago, we will see that although it is so old, it still

has a message for today.

This, of course, is because it is the word of God. And being God's word, it has an eternal message. Notice here, then, first of all, God's complaint.

He calls for heaven and earth to hear his word. Now, he's not speaking of the inanimate heavens, he's not speaking of this globe upon which we live, but he's speaking of the intelligences that occupy the heavens, that is, the angels of God, and he's speaking concerning the men and the women that live here on the earth, the human beings, calling upon all of them to be witnesses to this complaint that God has concerning his people. God speaks here, first of all, as the sovereign of the universe, the one who is the owner, having created it all, and having the right to rule, and yet not as a distant sovereign who might be in the palace and inaccessible to his subjects, but rather as one who is a sovereign over his own children, so that he's not only a sovereign, he is a father.

And in this, I think we see a little bit of the amplitude of the heart of God. We notice here that he says, I have nourished and brought up children, and they rebelled against me. Isn't it a sad picture in this earth when we find sometimes families where the children have rebelled against the parents? And yet, is it not almost always true that when the children have rebelled against the parents, it is because of the way that the parents have brought up the children? Is it not usually that the parents have neglected the children, that the parents have abused the children, that the parents have been overly severe, perhaps, with the children? But now, when God speaks of his children rebelling against him, that is not the case at all.

God says here that the ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib. Now, the crib, of course, is not the crib of a baby where you're going to place your baby to lie, but it is the crib of the animal where the owner puts the food for the animal to eat. And here, then, it speaks of God, then, being the owner and being the one who provides for his people, but his people are ignorant of these things, and his people are ungrateful of these things.

God provides for us each and every day. Do we recognize that the air that we breathe is air that God has given us to breathe freely? Do we recognize that the water that we drink, and although we have to pay for it because of the municipal water system, and it costs money to get it to us, that water has been provided for us freely by God? Do we recognize that even the food that we eat, although much of it has come through various processing methods, it has originally been provided for us by God? That he is the one who has made this world so that it would produce the food and all of the necessary things that man needs for life, and that it is a manifestation of the goodness of God that we have tasty things to eat, and it is a manifestation of the goodness of God that in these United States we have an abundance of things to eat. Sometimes I actually feel ashamed when I consider how at least a fourth of the people of the world have such an abundance in the United States, and we eat to our full, and we throw away the scraps, when there are people that would, if they only had those scraps, they would gladly eat them.

But God provides these things for us in abundance, and what is our response then to God? Are we of these people here rebelling against him, not knowing and not considering what God has provided for us? But God speaks here not only of this, but I wonder if he would speak to us today and would ask us about these things. Would he ask us, do we give thanks every time before we eat? Do I think that's a simple way that we can manifest our gratefulness to God for the food that we eat? How many people are there in the United States today who give thanks before they eat? If you have opportunity to be in the homes of various people, or in restaurants, in public places, surely it should not be difficult for us to give thanks even

in a public place. It is a testimony to God, and many people appreciate it, even though they do not practice it themselves.

I think that we should give thanks not only in our homes, but even in public places where we might be. But he speaks not only, then, of the ungratefulness and the rebelliousness of these people. He speaks not only of the ignorance and the indifference of these people.

He speaks also of the sickness of these people. Now, when he's speaking here about sickness, he's not saying that they have pneumonia or they have some other disease of the body. But it is a disease of the soul, of the spirit of man.

It is that sickness that comes in, and he says, Ah, sinful nation! And then he goes on to describe here these people, chickens, the whole head is sick, the whole heart is pained. A sinful nation. Sin has come in and has made them sick.

You know, this word sin, in the Bible, means to fall short, to come short. It means to miss the mark. It means to miss that which God has in mind for you and for me.

God desires a full and abundant life for each and every one of us, and missing God's mark, really, is sinning. Now, of course, it involves more than this. It involves both a positive rebellion and a negative rebellion, because sin is rebellion as he speaks here of these people as being a people who have rebelled against him.

Many people would not say that they are rebellious against God, and yet if you were to stop and analyze things and ask them why they do this and why they don't do that, I think it would not be at all difficult to show them where, in reality, in the center of their hearts, they are in rebellion against God. God, for instance, desires that his people, that these who have been created by him, should acknowledge him in all of their ways. And how many people are there that acknowledge God today in all of their ways? God has commanded that we should love him above all things, with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

Now, that when God commands such a thing, it's not that God is a selfish, self-centered God, but that God knows that we can enter into the abundance of life only to the degree that we enter into fellowship with him. And anyone, then, that is not in true fellowship with God is missing the greatest blessings of life, is missing the meaning of life, really, is coming short of the mark, is sinning, and is, in the ultimate analysis, rebelling against God. And so, these people here, a sinful nation laden with iniquity, and iniquity, then, is all that is contrary to holiness.

As God pictures himself here as the Holy One of Israel, it says of these people, they have forsaken the law. You'll find worship places abandoned today because the people have generally forsaken the law. In this country, the situation is not so bad.

I wonder when it will get bad, or worse, shall I say. In Europe, in Great Britain today, many churches are completely closed because the people just are not interested in attending anymore. It is interesting that one of the officials of the National Council of Churches here in the United States wrote a book in which he presents the formula for failure in a church, and he says the formula for failure is to, first of all, be ecumenical, secondly, to be relevant, and I forget what his third point was, but, of course, they were the three points that the National Council of Churches is continually emphasizing, and he was saying that these three things are the way to fail.

What he was saying was, and this man seemed to have an idea as to what the people really need, simply being ecumenical and so-called relevant is not meeting the soul's needs of the people, and after all, the people are realizing that they're not getting down into the heart of the necessity of the people today, and it is only God's Word itself coming across to us with God's message of salvation that gets to the heart of the people, and here he is saying that people have forsaken him. Now, have we perhaps in subtle ways forsaken the Lord and neglect walking with him? Do we begin each day by thinking about our God and our relationship to him and what he wants us to do during the day? You know, to forsake the Lord you don't need to blaspheme his name, and you don't need to go out and commit some great sin. All you need to do is turn your back upon him, abandon his holiness.

As he says here, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel. God in his holiness desires to call us into fellowship with himself that we might be partakers of his holiness. The Bible speaks of the necessity of worshipping God in the beauty of holiness.

Is holiness a beautiful thing, too? Is holiness that which our hearts long for, that which we desire? Do we really desire to have fellowship with the God of the universe, this one who is above all, and yet who wants to enter into an intimate fellowship and community with each and every one, provoking the Holy One of Israel? And then he says they have gone away backwards, a backsliding people. We talk about progress today, but God talks about backsliding, going backwards, and actually it would seem to be that with material progress there is spiritual backwardness and backsliding. Going backwards, spiritually speaking, with all the material progress that there is in the world today, with the conveniences that there are to life, with the good things that we can participate that, shall we say, creation has to offer to us, are we suffering setbacks spiritually? Are we going backwards insofar as our relationship with God is concerned? And here God has to speak to these people in the great disappointment of his heart, and he says, why should you be stricken anymore? You know, God himself was stricken in by means of the Assyrian in Isaiah's day, as they came up against the people, and came against the land, and destroyed many of the cities, and they suffered great hardship and punishment from the hand of God.

I wonder how many times people today are insensible to God's hidden deceit to them, through their sicknesses, and their setbacks, and their troubles, and their turmoil, not recognizing that it is God himself who holds the answer and the key to these things. Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is pain.

Here he speaks of the head being sick, the feet of the intellect, and the heart being faint, the feet of the will. He shows these things, both the intellect and the will, being absolutely out of communion and fellowship with God, and God has had to chasten them because of these things. You know, sometimes people today think, well, really what difference does it make? And they are indifferent to any chastening that God might bring into their lives.

I have a friend who was telling me one day about his brother. We were talking about different things, and he told me about his brother Jim that one day, Jim had done something disobeying his father, and his father and I had to give him a thanking, and he gave him a good, sound thanking. And Jim came back into his brother, and he told him, well, it was worse.

Well, you know, sometimes we might think that sin is worth it, and yet it's not. Not for a minute. Sin is never worth it.

Sin always brings its setback so that one cannot enter into the fullness of life that God wants to bring into our lives, and sin then continually is messing up this life that God has given us. But then beyond that, the Lord Jesus Christ is the very one who spoke to us of a coming day when there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. As people who are rejected from the presence of God, although they thought that everything was all right, they find themselves rejected from His presence and cast into outer darkness, into suffering from the wrath of God, where they shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

You know, it's interesting that in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus Christ tells in two different Gospels. Perhaps they are different aspects of one total story that He told, but He says it in that last day when the door is closed, when some shall come saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us. And then these who have been engaged in so-called Christian service shall say, Lord, we've cast out devils in Your name.

We've prophesied in Your name. We've done many wonderful works in Your name. And He said, depart from me, I never knew you.

You workers of iniquity. There were the people who were actively engaged in Christian work. And then in another Gospel, it tells about others coming to Him and saying, Lord, open unto us.

And they said, we ate in Your presence, and You taught in our streets. These are the people that were on the receiving end. And you have to close the door on them and say, I never knew you.

And so it takes in, then, all people, people who were deceived, calling themselves Christians. And yet, if God were to be able to speak to them in an audible voice today, as actually He does, through His word, God would register His disappointment even today. God's disappointment in the way that you walk, in the way that you live, in the way that you think, as nothing is subject to Him and entering into His plans and purposes for your life, and taking your life, and molding it, and beautifying it, and making it meaningful and worthwhile even now.

God complains about His people. But then, beginning at verse 10 here in Isaiah, we find that God commands His people. And the first thing that He commands them is to listen.

Hear the word of the Lord. And though He is speaking to Israel, He says, Ye rulers of Sodom, give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah have such a reputation that although it was over approximately 4,000 years ago that those cities were destroyed, they are sinning today for wickedness.

And here, God is calling these people in the days of Isaiah now, over a thousand years after these cities were destroyed, He is calling His own people Sodom and Gomorrah. What would He call the United States today, if He were to address them? I believe He would use exactly the same words. He would call the United States today Sodom and Gomorrah.

The wickedness that is arising in this land, that is growing, that is overpowering people today would identify them with these people. But God says, even though you're Sodom and Gomorrah, listen to the word of the Lord. Listen to the word of the Lord.

To what purpose is the most of your sacrifices unto Me? And He goes on and speaks of His utter rejection of that which He Himself had one day established. God had previously given to His people sacrifices whereby they could approach Him. He had given them a law, and when they broke this law, they could

come before Him with sacrifices.

But God says, now these people are coming before Him not with the same spirit that He had intended that they come when He had instituted these sacrifices. God had said, all right, if you break the law, you can come before Me with a sacrifice and I will accept you. I will receive you on the basis of that sacrifice.

But now the people were just doing it indifferently. Well, all right, that's fine. You can offer a sacrifice, what difference does it make? And so they just had that attitude.

There was no repentance accompanying the sacrifice. So God says that He rejects their sacrifices, He rejects their days of festivals which were instituted there in the Old Testament as God told them that they should observe these things. He even rejects their prayers.

He says, you lift up your hands unto Me and pray. He says, but I do not do. He absolutely rejects all of these things because the people were doing these things hypocritically, indifferently, irreligiously, not doing them in sincerity and approaching the Holy One of Israel who, in one sense, is transcendent and far above them, and in another sense desires to be imminent and desires to share with them their life here in this world.

So God demands them to turn their backs upon these vain works that they were using in attempting to procure their salvation. You know, the New Testament tells us that the works of men are of no avail for salvation. Paul, in writing to Titus, says, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saves us.

It's not by works of righteousness at all. It's nothing that we can do they could possibly favor. We have a very strange way of considering things these days.

People look at things and they say, well, I'm doing the best I can, and they think that just because they're doing the best they can that they will be received by God. But let me ask you, do you really do the best you can? I think if you're honest with yourself you would say, well, I could do better. In other words, you're not doing the best you can.

But even if you were doing the best you could, you're not doing good enough. Because the Bible says that all have sinned and conserved the glory of God, and we know it, you and I know it, every one of us have sinned before God. What is God going to do about those sins? Is He just going to overlook them? Is He just going to weigh the good things that we do against the bad things that we do, and we hope for the best that these things will perhaps at least balance themselves out, or perhaps the good things weigh more than the bad things? When someone commits some crime, some infraction of the law, does the court ask, well, now what good things have you done? Does the court seek to pardon you on the basis of certain good things that you've done, that you've been an exemplary citizen in many other ways, in order to get you off the hook? Or does not the court say, now look, there is this infraction that you have committed, and because of this infraction there is a penalty to pay, and so you're sentenced to jail, or a fine, or both.

And yet people expect God's justice to be different. And yet when we stop to think about it, as far as God's law is concerned, how many times every day do we violate God's law? And how many times then every week, and every month, and every year do we violate God's law? Go ahead and multiply them. See how many times God has to chunk up things against you in His register, and then by the end of your life, how many sins will you have against you in God's book? How can you possibly avoid all of it, and say, well, I

think that maybe God will forgive me? God doesn't just forgive these things.

God is absolutely righteous and moral, and He demands of us that we be the same. And in everything that we are not the same, there is a sin that must be accounted for. So that God says to these people, He says, I want no more of all of these feast days and these sacrifices and these vain religious attempts that you're making to try and make yourself acceptable to me.

Your heart is not right! And there must be then a change of heart. Now, the Bible goes on to describe this change of heart that we'll be speaking about in a minute, but let me just mention it. This change of heart is basically what the Bible calls repentance and then faith.

And it's by repentance and faith that one comes into the blessedness of sin forgiven. Because here in verse 18, a beautiful word, God says, Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Is there any color that is more striking and can be better seen from a distance than scarlet or crimson? Here, these two shades of red that are striking and outstanding and that can be seen from a tremendous distance is what God uses to describe how our sins appear to be in His sight. They're scandalous in the sight of God.

But God says, now look, let's reason about this. In the first place, we should be reasonable, but in the second place, it's a legal term, really. And He's saying, let's talk about this together.

Now look, He says, I've got a way that I can pardon you. If you will accept it and if you will just come in this way, I'll pardon you and I'll change you completely. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

You know, these words were written many days, many years before modern pollution came in. We sometimes have a difficulty understanding this because we who live in a city know how dirty that snow can get just after a couple of days. But that's just our modern pollution.

There in Israel, in these days that Isaiah was speaking, the snow remained white. And God says, that's just the way I'll turn you. Your sins being as red as scarlet can be made as white as snow.

Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. What does it mean, they shall be as wool? Well, you know, it's an interesting fact that the only natural cleansing agent for wool, now I say natural cleansing agent because there are many chemical cleansing agents, but the only natural cleansing agent for wool is blood. And blood was used back in those days for washing wool.

It would get all of the impurities out of the wool. And here God is using a terminology that they would understand that if they would only bring their sacrifices with repentant hearts, having faith in God that he would really remove their sins, that God would do it. But now, of course, the New Testament tells us that it is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin, not the blood of Golden Loaf, because he fulfilled the meaning of those sacrifices of the Old Testament.

And, as the New Testament tells us, we must come to the Lord Jesus Christ, then, in repentance and faith in order that we might now enter into the blessedness of sin forgiven through the Lord Jesus Christ. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin, this precious blood, is the only way that our sins, though they be red like crimson, can be made as white as wool. All cleanse.

Cleanse in the eye of God. Cleanse as far as his record is concerned. He says, I will blot out their transgressions.

And we can thank God that there is a blotting out through the Lord Jesus Christ. And, dear friends, God says, come now and let us reason together. Just coming before him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and saying, I receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

He is my all. I will trust in him. I will live for him.

But, you know, God just doesn't stop there. He gives us two alternatives here in these last two verses that we read of Isaiah 19 and 20. He said, But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword for the mouth of the Lord.

That is verse 20. But verse 19 says, If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. So there was, on the one hand, the blessing if they would obey God's word.

On the other hand, there was the curse if they would refuse God's word. But they had a decision to make. And this is what the Bible is continually telling us.

You and I have to make decisions. And now, confronted with God's message, he says, Listen. Your sins are terrible in my sight.

But I can produce forgiveness of these sins through the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you come to him? He died on the cross for you. So now, will you come to him and trust him as your own Lord and Savior? And he says, If you will.

If you will make that decision to receive Jesus Christ into your heart and life, you will experience a transformed life. You will experience new life. You'll experience my blessing.

But he says, If you don't. He says, I will send a sword in the land. And the last book of the Bible tells us about that sword.

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes in judgment the second time, when he comes again in judgment, there shall come as a sword out of his mouth the word of God, applying God's judgment here in this scene. Dear friends, I ask you, what will it be for you when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again? Will you see the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Will you be presented before him, spotless, cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or will you see the Lord Jesus Christ as your judge, as one who comes with that sword, condemning? Because although today he offers salvation in righteousness, he must condemn. Now then, these things seem so strange to people because people speak today about the love of God, and they speak only about the love of God.

They've got a very lopsided God, really. But the Bible presents to us a God who is completing his character, and who is love, yes, on the one hand, and who is righteousness on the other hand. And these two things walk together in perfect harmony.

God in love offers salvation, but God in righteousness will judge. Oh, dear friends, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ this morning, and trust him as your Lord and Savior. Repent of your sins.

And your sins, though they be red like crimson, they shall be made as white as wool. And would that you enter then this morning into this wonderful salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and experiencing a

transformation of life as we do. Let us pray.

Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you and praise you and bless you for the Lord Jesus Christ, because he is the Savior that you have given to the world. Oh, Lord God, we thank you that he invites each and every one to come unto him, to trust him. Come unto me, all ye that labor in a heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink. The Lord Jesus Christ is continually uttering those blessed words, Come unto me. He is the Savior.

Our God, we recognize that only in him is there salvation, because there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. We recognize to our heavenly Father that in our sins we are entirely lost, dead in trespasses and sins, unable to respond to your invitation. There must be that gracious work of your Holy Spirit.

Oh, our God, we pray that your Holy Spirit may work then this morning and may definitely apply the word, thy word, that has been given forth in order that it might produce salvation for your honor and glory, for the blessing of dear people here this morning that still have not entered into that salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our God, we commit ourselves then into your hands and pray your precious blessings upon each of us in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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