

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 – 2025

¹ *The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*

¹⁰ *Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!* ¹¹ *What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats.*

¹² *When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more!* ¹³ *Bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation—I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.*

¹⁴ *Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.* ¹⁵ *When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.* ¹⁶ *Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove your evil deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil;* ¹⁷ *learn to do good; seek justice; rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.*

¹⁸ *Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: if your sins are like scarlet, will they become like snow? If they are red like crimson, will they become like wool?* ¹⁹ *If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land,* ²⁰ *but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

Johnny, the painter, was big on cutting corners so he could make more of a profit. So, when a church hired him to paint their wooden building, Johnny submitted the lowest bid, and was hired. As always, he thinned his latex paint with water to stretch it.

One day while he was up on the scaffolding — the job almost finished — he heard an oppressively loud burst of thunder, and it began raining cats and dogs.

The torrential rain washed the thinned paint off the church while intense winds blew Johnny off his scaffolding to the church graveyard, surrounded by puddles of thinned paint.

Johnny interpreted this as a warning from God above, so he got on his knees and cried: "Oh, God! Please forgive me! What should I do?"

God's voice thundered from heaven: "Repaint and thin no more!"

In today's scripture reading we find that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, demanding that the people of Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah repent of their sins and return to God.

Isaiah lived during the time when Israel had been divided into two kingdoms: Israel was the northern kingdom and Judah was the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom had already made a mess of things for themselves because they turned away from God.

Isaiah likely saw the writing on the wall for the southern kingdom because they were starting to head in the same direction. Like the sins of the northern kingdom, they were beginning to worship idols, warping justice, oppressing the poor and looking for military aid from pagan nations **instead** of turning to God for guidance and help.

Although we could assume that Isaiah saw the writing on the wall, we find that what happened was more than that, he, in fact, had a vision. That's important to note, even before we actually dig into the actual prophecies—of which there are many—that Isaiah shared with the

people of that day. Biblical Commentator William Barclay explains that the use of the word, "vision" tells that the words of the prophet "go beyond the immediate historical circumstances of his day."

That means that his vision is meant for us, too, as a warning—just as it was for the people of his day. As a vision, we should understand that the prophet was seeing into the future and is saying to us, something like, "if the shoe fits, wear it." We are invited to listen, and learn from the mistakes of the people of his day. The bottom line of Isaiah's message was and is a call for repentance—meaning turn from sin and turn back to God.

Before Isaiah gets into the actual prophecies from God, he reminds the people of the destruction that came upon the people of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. He wanted them to remember, God's willingness to spare Sodom and Gomorrah of destruction if faithful people could be found; and God in fact, did spare a very small handful of faithful people.

This reminder made the point, that though the people he was speaking to were disobedient to God, it wasn't too late for them to turn from their sin. But, in order for the people to really hear God, they were going to need to listen closely to what the prophet said, **and** be obedient. They could not have selective hearing, meaning, of course, only processing in our understanding and willingness to do those things that we want to hear.

If we are honest with ourselves, we all have selective hearing sometimes, even when it comes to listening to God; especially when we want to do something that we think sounds more appealing than what we know God wants. Isaiah warns us not to have selective hearing. He essentially says. "Listen to my warning, otherwise the results may be devastating if we don't.

Isaiah went on to communicate to the people on God's behalf that God was not happy with their worship and their sacrifices. God was not unhappy with the actual practice of offering sacrifices to him, but God knew their sacrifices were meaningless to them. They offered sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin, but the meaning was nothing more than the killing and shedding of the blood of animals. God knew the people really were not sorry for their disobedience and lack of faith.

The sacrifices they offered were supposed to be an outward sign of their inward faith in God, but God, who knows everything that is in the hearts of people, knew this was not the case. The evidence of this reality was found in the manner of their living. Their worship was nothing more than improper laundering of their clothes, which when they put them on again, were still obviously dirty.

Isaiah was and is calling for repentance. The gap between worship and life, between Sunday and the rest of the week, is what the prophet is attacking. It's not just about what we do on Sunday, but also what we do the rest of the week.

Repentance requires obedience to God. One interesting thing about the prophet's message calling for obedience is that he is not calling for adherence to the Ten Commandments, but instead: "to seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless and plead for the widows." Quite honestly, these are the same callings of obedience we hear from the other Biblical prophets.

We read in Hosea 12:6, that the prophet says there, "But as for you, return to your God; hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God."

We read in Amos 5:24 that the prophet Amos instructs us: to "let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

We read that the prophet Micah says in 6:8 of his book: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"

The prophets did not say to us that following the 10 commandments is all we need to do to be right with God, that simply is not enough; but they demanded justice, kindness, humility from us, all of which are extensions of the commandments. They are greater values **demanding something from our hearts**.

There simply isn't room in our hearts for both sinfulness and God. Jesus teaches us that we are to love God, and only God, first and foremost, **with our whole hearts**, with everything that makes us who we are; and to love our neighbors, even our enemies, as we love ourselves. If we repent of our sinful ways, getting that trash out of our hearts, and get ourselves in-sync with these commandments, the other values that the prophets call us to attend to, will be a part of our efforts in obedience to God.

As we all know, none of us is perfect, and try as we may to wash ourselves clean of sin, we mess up again and again. It may feel pointless to try. But the prophet shares with us the loving promise of God that can save us when we repent, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson they will be like wool."

Scarlet and crimson were the colors of a deep permanent dye, and its deep stain was virtually impossible to remove from clothing. The stain of sin seems equally permanent, but God can remove sin's stain from our lives just as God promised to do for the Israelites.

Jonathan Spurloch, a Baptist pastor told this story, "I used to wash my white clothes in hot water with some bleach. That, I had heard, was one way to keep your whites, white. And most of the time, it worked!

One time it worked too well.

I had loaded up the washer with a week's worth of whites, added the detergent, added the bleach, turned up the water to hot, got the washing machine started, and then went about my business. In my past experiences, washers tend to stay where they're placed but when one of them does start to move, you know you have problems. That day, like all the other days we lived in that house, the washer stayed put just fine.

But there was another problem.

The load of whites came out—PINK!

Somehow a formerly (!) bright red shirt had gotten mixed in the whites and I hadn't even noticed it. Yes, I started with a load of whites, and wound up with a load of pinks!

Of course, there wasn't much I could do about it so—I thought, real men can wear pink (and some do) but that doesn't mean we have to like it! Socks were no problem, they're hidden, mostly by my pants legs and the shoes themselves. Underwear generally isn't seen, either, so that wasn't much of a problem. T-shirts, though, well, that's another story. I tried to find good homes for them elsewhere!

Just like my clothes turning a permanent pink that never did wash out, sin will do that to all of us. In fact, it already has, thanks to the sin of Adam and Eve. Isaiah is pointing this out to the people of his day.

And yet, the LORD offers hope! Forgiveness! He asked, and asks, all of us to "reason together," or to have a conversation, which is the common phrase we use these days. Best of all, the LORD promises those that even if your sins are like scarlet—a very bright red—they shall be as white as snow.

Pastor Spurloch says, I tried my best to make my pink clothes white, but it didn't work. Fortunately, sin does not need to be a permanent stain on us." We know more about that than the people of Isaiah's day, don't we? We have the Good News of Jesus Christ, who paid the price as the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin. When we genuinely confess and repent of our sin, we are forgiven.

Although we may find it hard to believe because we may feel terrible about some of the things we've done, we can be assured God forgives us. Therefore, we should forgive ourselves, learn from our mistakes, and move forward in the newness of life that God gives us. We should live up to the higher values that the prophets bring to our attention.

Thank goodness God sent us a Savior. God knew we needed this incredible Savior to teach us the truth and lay down his life for us. If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer;

But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior. Our Savior cleans us up and we become incredibly valuable to God, to each other, to ourselves, and to the work of God's kingdom.

A woman once wrote that at a garage sale she had spotted a handsome antique copper kettle for only \$2.50. It was badly tarnished, so she asked the woman running the sale if the discoloration would come out.

She cheerfully offered to try some copper cleaner on it and disappeared with it into the house. Reappearing with the gleaming kettle, she handed it to the buyer for inspection. It was indeed a more attractive item, plus it also had a new tag attached. It read: "Like new-\$10."

Interesting. When the copper kettle 1st went on sale, it's owner practically gave it away.

But something changed its worth. What made the kettle more valuable? A simple cleansing.

When the owner took the trouble to clean away the grime/ removed the discoloration and stains it was worth 4 times as much

Almost everything IS more valuable once it has been washed & cleaned up - and so it is with us.

There's no denying that we've all got some dirty laundry to wash and kettles to polish. We know what needs to be done to make us clean, beginning with our worship, here and now. And as the stain of our sin comes out in the wash and polishing, we surely will become instruments to bring about justice, kindness, and humility. For the prophets sent by God, declare the warning and the need for a response from us, announcing that those who sincerely love the Lord and respond with obedience will be rewarded.

Listen, once again, to these words from the prophet: *"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; 20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword."* For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Amen.