

The God of Reconciliation Seeking Lost Sinners

Rev. J. Greendyk

- Psalter 265:all
- Scripture: Isaiah 1:1-20
- Psalter 255:all
- Psalter 140;2-4
- Psalter 112:1-2

The text we wish to meditate upon with you may be found in the portion that we have read, Isaiah 1:18, where we read in God's Word, "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."

From the words of our text, we will consider:

The God of Reconciliation Seeking Lost Sinners

With the help of the Lord, we will examine three thoughts:

1. An Awful Indictment, which will center around the verses preceding the text.
2. An Unbelievable Invitation
3. A Gracious Promise.

The God of Reconciliation Seeking Lost Sinners. First, An Awful Indictment; secondly, An Unbelievable Invitation; and thirdly, A Gracious Promise.

Congregation, Isaiah is very well known as a prophet who is also labelled an evangelist. When you study the book of Isaiah, it reveals that his writings, especially from chapters 40 onward, overflow with the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Even before that, Isaiah is filled with desire for the coming of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit has inspired Isaiah, clearly revealing him to be the gospel prophet of the Old Testament. The book of Isaiah deals not only with the person of Christ, the offices of Christ, the grace of Christ, and the kingdom of Christ; it also speaks of Christ's coming in the flesh. He reveals to us how Christ has to be born in Bethlehem. He reveals that Christ has to suffer, bleed, and die. He reveals that Christ will rise again and be the glory of His Father, and that the gospel will

triumph throughout the whole world.

Many in the New Testament also spoke of this special prophet. John the Baptist speaks of him when he begins his ministry, He begins his preaching with a passage from Isaiah. Jesus Christ, when beginning His ministry, refers to the prophet Isaiah. Philip also preached to the eunuch from Isaiah.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived approximately 770 years before Christ. He lived 125 years, eighty-five of which he was a prophet. It is believed that he lived during the time of King Manasseh of Judah. The book of Isaiah starts in a very remarkable way. The Lord appears in a vision to Isaiah.

A vision, children, is not a dream. A dream is something that occurs while we are sleeping. A vision is something that occurs while we are awake. Let me give you a simple example. It would be like sitting in school and daydreaming while looking out the window. The teacher is continuing with the lesson and your mind is miles away on something else. You have all kinds of pictures and thoughts flashing through your mind, but you don't even hear your teacher talking.

I. An Awful Indictment

When God came to Isaiah with a vision, it was for a specific purpose. His intention was that the prophet Isaiah would take that message and reveal the mind of God to the people. That is exactly what is bound upon the heart of Isaiah by Jehovah. He speaks through the Word of the Lord. He is called to unfold that vision of Judah and Jerusalem to the people, but also to us. Remember, Isaiah was a prophet to the tribe of Judah and thus this vision has reference to Judah. What is so amazing about this vision is that it reveals a deep-seated grief in the heart of God against the people of Judah. In fact, there is such a deep grief in the heart of God regarding the rebellion of Judah and Jerusalem, that when the vision comes to Isaiah, he does not even want to speak to the people any more. Why? Because in response to all God's callings and warnings, Judah and Jerusalem have closed their ears. They have gone their own way. What does the Lord declare in this vision? He says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth."

What is the Lord trying to tell us? He is revealing to us that if these people would not hear, He would turn to the heavens and earth, and speak to them. God uses

something which we know with our human mind is impossible to be fulfilled. The earth cannot hear the Lord speak, because it has no ear. The heavens cannot hear the Lord speak, because they have no ears.

The Lord is telling us that the condition of Judah and Jerusalem is tragic, terrible, and desolate. The Lord becomes tired of calling and warning these people, tired of seeking to guide them for the good of their souls, for their prosperity as a nation. He not only calls the heavens and earth to hear, but then turns to the irrational creatures, irrational creatures which have to be trained by man to follow in a certain way. He also says as it were, "I have nourished and brought up children, and what have they done? They have rebelled against me."

Does the Lord also say that of us today? I have nourished these people, I have caused My Word to be preached or read, I have revealed the gospel of My dear Son in the midst of them. However, is there a deep-seated grief in the heart of God tonight because so many are disobedient and rebellious against the command of God to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? God says, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." How humbling God's declaration should have been for Judah and Jerusalem. It should have made them small. It should have shaken them awake to think that the Lord would speak to an ox or an ass, which are irrational. Indeed, it is true, that a farmer's voice is known even by his cattle, and an ass or a donkey knows where to get his food. That's what the Lord is saying. My people are seeking things that will starve them to death. And, my unconverted fellow traveller, you are doing the same as these irrational creatures whom God uses to illustrate how deaf we are to His callings, how dumb we are to what He desires to give us, and how blind we are regarding our great need. Do we not by nature seek our food in sin to fill our emptiness? Do we not seek our food in the world to satisfy our emptiness? Do we not seek those things that will destroy our body as well as ruin our soul, while the irrational ox and ass know where to get what they need to live?

Thus the Lord says today: "Congregation, you also have heard the gospel; you know that it is only by the gospel that you can have life in the midst of your self-made death, be delivered from all your misery and sin, and be reconciled unto Me. Oh why will ye turn away from Me?" Oh, what an awful indictment the Lord

utters against wicked, hard-hearted sinners!

The Lord reveals more with this awful indictment. What does He do? He increases the awfulness of the indictment. He goes from bad to worse. He says, "Ah, sinful nation." The word "ah" in Hebrew is an expression of profound grief, sorrow, and disappointment. Does God say that about you today? Does He say that about you who are unconverted, you, who have heard the gospel of reconciliation, you who are a rational creature? Ah, this people, how sinful they are, laden with iniquity, hardhearted, rebellious, stubborn, always resisting My Holy Spirit.

Oh, congregation, if we could see the face of God today, I think we would see grief in His face regarding our unbelief. He is deeply grieved with the hardness of our hearts. He is deeply grieved with our rejecting the gospel, the very life and food of our soul.

But, He goes further; He calls Judah and Jerusalem a seed of evildoers. What is the Lord revealing here? He is not only speaking of Judah and Jerusalem, but He is speaking of you and me in our total depravity. He is revealing unto us the fruitlessness of His striking Judah and Jerusalem any more. What does the Lord mean?

The Lord had sent other nations against Judah and Jerusalem with His judgments in order to bring them to repentance. Instead of their hearts being broken, like the people in the time of the judges, they hardened themselves under His judgments. They reacted in the same spirit of Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him?" What does the Lord therefore say? He says, "Why should ye be stricken any more? What good are My judgments and warnings?"

Congregation, what is the use of the Lord's giving us a minister to bring His Word, the gospel of life, as well as bringing us warning, if we turn not unto the Lord? Truly, we are no different from this people of Judah and Jerusalem!

Does the Lord view us as He viewed Judah and Jerusalem? Does not this awful indictment fit us also?

Next, the Lord says with all these judgments, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." your "head is sick, and [your) whole heart faint. From the sole. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but

wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (vv. 5-6). What does the Lord mean here? These people were content to go around with the wounds they received in warfare. They were no burden to them. It did not bring them to consider that these things were due to their disobedience to God. By means of all the judgments, the countries of Judah and Jerusalem became desolate, were destroyed and overrun, yet they still turned away from the Lord.

Then follows an amazing text in verse 9. The Lord has been saying that He would utterly destroy them, forever forsake them as they had forsaken Him, yet listen, "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." What happened in Sodom and Gomorrah, children? Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire, God was revealing that He would not come with total destruction upon Judah. And why? Because there was a small remnant whom the Lord loved. There was yet a praying and begging people. They were praying for the return of Judah and Jerusalem to God's ways. . Congregation, are there also praying children of God who cry out to God for His mercy on such a disobedient and gospel hardened people? Perhaps they are only few in number in comparison to those who are unconverted, but are we laboring as a small flock, as a little flock, children of God, for the conversion of sinners, for the rich outpouring of Christ's gospel grace? Are we earnest for the souls of those who are perishing around us?

Then follows, "Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom." Do you know what that means? God is speaking of the office-bearers in Judah and Jerusalem. He includes them also as being like the people in Sodom. Dear office-bearers, is this what the Lord sees in our hearts? If the Lord were to come today, would He find even among us as office-bearers those who are like Sodom?

The Lord continues by saying, "Give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." He actually compares Judah's and Jerusalem's condition to that of Gomorrah before the Lord came with fire and brimstone. Do you know what is still worse? We see that these "people of Sodom" in their own eyes were a very religious people. They were full of self-made religion. This is revealed in the words, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the

LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings." In short, you know what God says? He says as it were, Your religion is not from your heart, but your religion only comes from your lips. Does the Lord have to say that of us also, congregation? Does He have to say that which He said unto Judah and Jerusalem and to Israel at large: "This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth, but their heart is far from me"? Are we like Judah and Jerusalem? If so, how terrible is our condition!

How remarkable that in all His sorrow, grief and disappointment with Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord comes and urges them to repentance. He says as it were: "Oh Judah and Jerusalem, even though you have destroyed yourselves, if you will but repent of your sins, if you will yet show true sorrow over sin; you will find that I am not a condemning God, but the one and only God who delights in mercy! You will find Me unwilling to pour out My wrath upon you, but most desirous to be the God of grace in whom dwelleth fullness for wretched sinners."

Sinner, the Lord urges you to repentance. Children of God, He calls us to repentance because of our shortcomings, because of our sins. Why is it that there are so few converted in our day? Children of God, is it not because we are not storming the throne of grace for more true conversions, for more of the Spirit's mighty and convincing work? Let us now go to our second thought and examine God's unbelievable invitation.

II. An Unbelievable Invitation

How amazing, the Lord comes with an unbelievable invitation! He does not come only to people who are convinced of their sin, but He comes with a free invitation to sin-laden, hard-hearted, and rebellious sinners. He comes to sinners who are steeped in sin and determined to go the wrong way.

Why does God come with this unbelievable invitation? To make His grace more amazing when He unfolds it; for when He reveals His grace, it causes the sinner to exclaim, "Amazing grace!"

There is another Biblical truth that is equally true. Judah and Jerusalem would not heed God's warnings and would not hearken to His invitations; thus they would make themselves ripe for God's just condemnation.

Congregation, we do the same when we refuse God's invitation. I hear someone

say, "But I can't refuse it. The Lord has to give it to me." Does not the Lord say in Proverbs 1:24, "I have called, and ye refused"? Ye refused! "I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded?" The fault of our condemnation cannot be charged to God. The fault lies entirely with you and me. If you are saved, you will indeed say, "Salvation is of the Lord," but if lost eternally, you shall forever say, "Damnation was my own making." Therefore, my dear friend, the Lord comes one more time today and says, "Come now, let us reason together." The Lord is sincere and earnest, and reveals that He desires salvation more than condemnation. He desires to unfold to us His way of salvation. He has given an answer to sin-laden man; for man who is full of iniquity, who is sin from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet; who has wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. The Lord says that there is remedy by Me for you, sinner. He desires to unfold it. He invites you to come and experience that there is a fullness of salvation in Him. He comes with a sincere invitation, with a sincere offer; and the rejection of that olive branch of peace held out to sinners will be their self-made doom. God comes in the sincerity of His heart, despite His profound grief. He still says today, "Oh people, you are rebellious, you are hard-hearted, you are an enemy, yet, 'Come, let us reason together,'"

This portion of the text can be compared to a conference with two opposing parties sitting down at a table. At this conference, however, we have nothing of our own to bring. We have no merits; we have no true religion of our own; we have no goodness at all, Is it not amazing that despite our wretchedness, despite our sinfulness, despite our total depravity, God still wants to have dealings with lost sinners? God still desires to reconcile sinners? And is there such a people who are in need of God's grace and salvation today? Our problem is that we do not realise that we are an enemy of God. Our problem is that our heart is hard and unbroken. But the Lord sees that as no obstacle. He says, "Come just as you are. Come with all your sins, Come with all your guilt. Come with all your wretchedness. Come with all your enmity. Come with your list of crimes, and I can make it well. I can perform a mighty work upon your soul which no man can work, which you cannot work." But "Come now, sinner." Why? Because the matter is urgent, the time is short, death is certain, and eternity is forever. God says, "Come now, let us reason together." Oh, how amazing that God reveals in this text His desire to

communicate with a sinner, but on His and not on the sinner's terms.

Oh congregation, we will not come nor do we have to come with a long list of demands to the Lord. Oh no, the Lord is going to tell us, "Listen to Me, sinner." He will speak with such a gracious, loving, tender, drawing voice, convincing us of His desire to do us good rather than destroy us. "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord." It is not Isaiah speaking; it is the Lord. It is God who has created us, God whom we have left, God to whom we have said, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." The same God who would be just in casting us away says, "Come now."

Oh congregation, how deaf we are to this unbelievable invitation! How hard our heart is if it is not broken under this gracious invitation! He reveals that His heart beats for our salvation. Therefore, He says just the opposite of what you and I have said to Him. We have said, "Depart," but God says "Come now." Oh sinner, would to God that such an invitation would break your heart. "Come now, let us reason together."

About what is the Lord now going to reason with us? You can find the answer in Isaiah 55:6-7 "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Congregation, the heart of God is revealed today in the midst of us as a heart not seeking our destruction. He is not seeking to pour out His wrath upon us, but He is seeking the good of our souls. Young people, here is a God as no other god. This God says, "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." There may be some here who say, But if you knew how sinful I am, how wretched I am; if you knew my hard heart and the blasphemous thoughts I have of God; if you knew how I have cursed God, taken His Name in vain, broken His Sabbath, oh, if you knew what a criminal I am before God, surely you would say to me, 'God cannot deal with you.'

My dear friend, God can deal with such sinners as you are because of Jesus Christ. Why? Because of Jesus Christ who hath borne the iniquities which sinners should have carried. Has not Jesus Christ come in the flesh? Was He not

circumcised the eighth day? Did He not submit to the holy law of God and fulfil all righteousness for disobedient sinners? Is there not sufficiency of righteousness in Jesus? Is there not plenty of satisfaction in Jesus? Is there not plenty of love in Jesus for loveless sinners? Is there not plenty of grace in Jesus for graceless sinners. Is there not plenty of mercy for wretched sinners? Is there not plenty of riches in Jesus for poor sinners? Is there not plenty of power in Jesus for helpless sinners? Is there not plenty of hope in Jesus for hopeless sinners? Are there not plenty of blessings in Jesus for cursed sinners? Surely there is, sinner. If it were not so, God would not say, "Come now, let us reason together." Despite our mountain of sins, the Lord excludes none from His invitation. If we are excluded, the blame for our damnation lies at our door.

Have you ever come to own your just condemnation? Have you ever come to see yourself as that criminal who deserves to be in the prison of darkness forever? Have you ever seen the enmity in your heart against God, as Scripture reveals in Romans 8:7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"? What is the enmity a sinner will learn? It is the enmity against the free grace of God. It is the enmity against Christ's work as the only work that counts with God. It is an enmity against the fullness of salvation for an empty sinner and this the sinner will learn by the Spirit of Christ as teacher.

When it becomes real in one's life, that he has rebelled against God, that he has hardened his heart against God, that he has transgressed His commandments, then the sinner will say with Ezra, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." Will God then say you are too great a sinner? The blood that My Son has shed is not sufficient? No, a thousand times no! He says, "Though your sins be as scarlet," though you be the chiefest 'of sinners, the worst of the worst; the biggest criminal, the greatest enemy; the most ignorant fool, and one dead in trespasses and sin; "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Let us consider this in the third thought, but before we do, let us sing Psalter 140:2-4.

III. A Gracious Promise

"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." What a gracious promise is revealed from this God who would be just to destroy us!

What does God want to reveal to us? He wants to reveal a full and free salvation. He wants to reveal to us that no matter what kind of sinner we are, whether old or young, whether big or small, whether the worst one in this church, town, or country or world, the Lord says "Come now sinner, let us reason together." The Lord says as it were: "I know you are a criminal, but I have called you. I know you are an enemy, but My Son reconciles enemies. I know that you do not love Me, but I have loved a people for Myself. So deep, rich, and broad is My love that it can even come unto you, sinner. The blood of Jesus Christ is all-sufficient; for all your sins, for all your guilt, for all your disobedience. My Son Jesus Christ has perfectly obeyed God's law and fully satisfied His Father's justice. He has paid the price for a sinner's debt and there is a *free*, a totally free salvation, available to you. Believest thou this?"

Congregation, that's the wonder of the gospel. That's the good news of the gospel! God desires to reconcile sinners. Has your being reconciled to God ever become impossible from your side? Has the Lord ever opened your eyes to see that your fleshly religion is a stench in God's nostrils and that all your righteousnesses are as filthy rags? Have you ever learned that soul-despairing lesson that all that you did to move the heart of God to have mercy on you, only made the burden of your sins greater and the condemnation of God more just? If so, was not the result greater sorrow and grief, but also a sense of holy despairing in self?

Yet what does the Lord reveal in this gracious promise? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." What does this mean? God is revealing a completeness in His dear Son. He is revealing the fullness of His salvation, a perfection in Jesus' work and a full satisfaction for divine justice. He is revealing that the attributes of God the Father are glorified through Jesus' suffering and His death. He is revealing that there is a Mediator between Himself as holy God and a guilty sinner. There is a bridge between God and your soul. And that bridge is the only Mediator between God and man.

My dear friend, what good news that is for a sinner who is broken, and comes before God with all his guilt! That's what the Lord is telling us here. He wishes to make it clear that we don't have to clean up our act before we come; we may come just as we are. There are people who think that we must first make ourselves right and good before we can come to the Lord, but that is contrary to the Scriptures and this text. That's impossible; have you learned this stripping truth? When we try to come before the Lord with our works, tears and prayers in order to move the heart of God, we are making the ground of our salvation our works and thus despising and rejecting Christ's perfect and accepted work. You and I are so foolish in thinking that our works are acceptable; this shows our enmity and sinful pride against God's gracious remedy. But how wonderful that God will also strip a sinner of this great problem and bring him, with nothing, to His feet. In what way? With the cry for mercy, pure mercy, for all his wretchedness. If God would allow a sinner to present himself to the Lord with something of his own, then God would have to acknowledge that the sacrifice of Jesus then will you the Holy Spirit to take away. Will not the Christ on the cross is lacking something. However, this is impossible because the Father has declared of His Son that He is well-pleased with Him.

Oh sinner, learn to despair of everything in self for only then will you experience Jesus to be precisely the Savior you need! Beg for the Holy Spirit to take away every obstacle and stumbling block you would put in the way. Will not the Holy Spirit teach a sinner that when he tries to clean up his life and seeks to make it better, in reality, and experientially, it becomes worse? Do you know what the Lord's purpose is? It is to bring that soul to die with all his works, to die with all his law efforts, to die with all his righteousness. This is a painful lesson, but an essential one. Those who have learned it know how painful it is to have to stand condemned, guilty, bankrupt, and naked before a sin-hating and sin-punishing God.

Dear congregation, if you have not yet learned that lesson, then you are far from that well of salvation. Yet I must say, God has set before us an open door, today. In what way?

Is not the gospel preached unto you? Does not the Lord declare: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that

thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:18, 20)? Is not the blood of Jesus Christ declared to be sufficient to wash away every sin of the sinner? Is not His sacrifice proclaimed to be the only atonement for sin? Oh congregation, what privileges! Do not our privileges far exceed most of the people who walk past this church, or that drunk who lies on the street? Are we not sitting at the gospel door and around the cross? What is the Lord saying to you, sinner? "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," which reveals that His salvation goes far and wide, but also comes so near. God declares in Romans 13:11, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." God the Father's heart is desirous that this full and free gospel will be unfurled for the good of our souls; and how wonderful that the work of salvation is designated to the Holy Spirit, This guarantees the fact that the work will not fail. He will make room in the heart. He will apply from the Word of God that which is needed to bring a sinner down from his pride, down from his self-righteousness, into the valley of humiliation, into the valley of self-abasement, into the valley of self-condemnation, into the valley where the sinner justifies God and condemns self.

God says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." So purifying and purging is the blood of Christ that not only does it atone for all sin, but it washes away the deepest stains of sin. "Though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool." Not only is there sufficient blood in Emmanuel's veins for every sinner here today, but there is also a righteousness available for our disobedience. And God says as it were, "I desire to give it to you for the good of your soul. I desire not your death, nor your destruction, but that you would turn unto Me and live."

Do you know who appreciates such a message? A brokenhearted sinner, a condemned sinner, a bankrupt sinner, who has learned that he cannot bring anything to the Lord. He is gladdened with such a message.

If there is a soul here today that says, "Lord, my sins are higher than the

mountains, I see not any way whereby they could ever be washed away," the Lord says to you, "Though they be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." Sins, in the plural, point to every sin being cast into the sea of eternal forgetfulness, God declares: My Son has humbled Himself so low, has gone under the whole burden and mountain of sin and has borne it upon His back to Calvary's hill. There He has laid Himself down, and has shed His blood, sinner.

Oh, dear soul in our midst who stands afar off, who sees no possibility on your side, who has to say that everything seems cut off, here is the way of salvation for you. Here is the door which is open before you, today. May God's blessed Spirit pull you through that door and show you the fullness and sufficiency in Christ Jesus, and the power of His cleansing blood.

Congregation, the gospel message comes to you today, and will God still say when we leave this place, and when He sees us this week in our various ways and activities, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity"? Today He has said, "Come, let us reason together," but tomorrow He may say, "Depart from me ye cursed." AMEN.