

Isaiah 1:18-20

"I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas"

If you have a Bible with you, would you find Isaiah 1:18?

On behalf of our staff, we want to wish you a Merry Christmas. We're thankful that you're a part of the church. We're glad that you made service tonight, that you made this an important part of your Christmas week. And I'd like to remind you of a couple of things that I think are important specifically to Christmas. Or maybe you don't know them at all, and today will be the first time that you really consider them.

We've entitled the message this evening "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." With all the rewriting of songs, I went back to another song they should just leave alone. But it was written by a songwriter from his heart many, many years ago, actually. But it was a cry from his heart to be back in the snow. He wasn't; he was out in Palm Springs, in the desert. And I really think it kind of goes along with the cry from the Lord to our hearts tonight, that He would like to do nothing more than to bring you into a relationship with Him that takes away your sin, that takes away the separation, that removes the things that can be a barrier into your life. Irving Berlin wrote the song "White Christmas." He reminisced in it about an old-fashioned kind of Christmas with snow on the ground. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the version that Bing Crosby sang is the single greatest-selling single in history; it has sold over 60 million copies (wish I'd written it). (Laughing) The story is told that he was with his wife (Irving Berlin was) in 1940 in La Quinta, at The La Quinta hotel which, at least in the 40's, was kind of the hangout for all the Hollywood types. And it was 82 degrees, and he wanted it to be snowing, and he longed for his home back East. The song has been recorded by everyone, it seems - every year somebody puts it out - since 1941. All of the recordings together have sold a little over 110 million copies. So it's certainly a song that most of us are aware of. The Bing Crosby version, I think, has been in publication since 1949 when the LP album came out, and it's been remade every year. The sentiment that drove the song, though, was interesting. If you've been to the desert, it's not very pretty in the winter, necessarily. But it's beautiful if it would be covered in snow, and it never is. But that was kind of his heart, that the white, fluffy snow could cover the barren ground; and then the lack of flowers and the gloom of winter could be covered by this beautiful white, refreshing new snow.

If you live in Southern California, you've got to drive a couple hours to see it, usually. If you live back East, you see it way too much. There's nothing in the middle.

Yet in some ways I guess Christmas is like that. It is God's way of renewing and regaining what we lost, the havoc of sin that took place years ago. I can only imagine, if you read through the book of *Genesis*, how nice it must have been, how blessed it must have been for Adam and Eve early on in the Garden with God; that they talked with God. Everything was provided for them. There was joy, and there was happiness, and there was good relationship, and then somehow all of that became quickly tinted and tainted by sin, overwhelmed with sorrow. Death soon followed. And man finds himself like that. We're all sinners. The Bible makes that pretty clear. If you think you're not, ask a friend. They'll tell you. But it has tainted our lives. And yet God, in His great love, determined not to lose His creation to sin and death. His solution, which was in place long before He made us, was to send His Son Jesus to redeem us and that He would bring us back to Himself; that He would remove the punishment that a righteous God would demand of man in his sin - death. He would pay it Himself that we could then find ourselves in a relationship with God because He would have gone to the cross to pay for our sins.

The book of *Isaiah* has been written and was written 700 years or so before Jesus came upon the scene; and it looked forward, in great anticipation, for Christmas, for the day of His birth. In fact, the book of *Isaiah* - unlike any other book in the Bible - is kind of a miniature Bible. There are sixty-six chapters in this book; there are sixty-six books in the Bible. The first thirty-nine chapters of the book of *Isaiah* speak about the judgment of God against sin; there are thirty-nine Old Testament books which speak about man's plight as well. The last twenty-seven chapters of the book of *Isaiah* speak about the coming Messiah, the hope of His coming; interestingly enough, there are twenty-seven New Testament books which talk about the grace of God and the goodness of God and the hope that the Messiah would bring.

So we read, here in verse 18, " 'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword'; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." We read, in

Isaiah 40:9-11, that "there are good tidings coming, so go up in the high mountains," Isaiah will write, "bring good tidings, lift up your voice, say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' " is coming. And indeed Christmas says He came. "His reward," we read, "is with Him, His work goes before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; gather the lambs in His arms, carry them in His bosom, gently lead those who are with young." The promise of a Savior to come.

Here, in chapter 1, the LORD, in speaking through Isaiah, speaks to His people. They are religious, they are chosen, they are His own in many ways; but yet this generation has gone far away and far removing themselves from any kind of relationship with God at all. In fact, this generation to whom Isaiah would speak was not at all like the past generations who worshipped God; this generation had no relationship with God at all. I'll tell you what they did have. They had church services and sacrifices and regular prayer days and feast days. They went through all of the motions. They showed up at the right time. They stood up when they needed to and raised their hands when they should and left when it was time; but they had no relationship with God - it was nonexistent, it was shallow, it was hypocritical. And yet the LORD says to this religious bunch of folks, "Come on, let's reason together. Consider your dilemma. Your sins are red like scarlet. But I have a solution for you - I can make them as white as snow."

I think that this message of Isaiah's to his generation 700 years before the promised Messiah would come is certainly apropos for our generation today, for our nation - it could use the message - and for the world in which we live. Let's get beyond the decorations and the pageantry and look at, again, where we stand with God tonight. Many people today are pretty religious. They're proud of their spirituality. You wonder what kind of difference it might make in their lives. This generation to whom God spoke these three verses was very proud of their spirituality, of their condition in life - they were the Jews. And yet the LORD says to them, "We should reason together." Because at some point in your life, your religion isn't going to save you or help you; it makes you comfortable, kind of like hamburgers, you know? You can always eat a hamburger and feel better. Well, at least I can. (Laughing) It's not exactly nutritious. And so your religion. It really doesn't bring you to God. It doesn't establish your hope for the future. It doesn't get you into heaven. And the LORD, in very clear terms - if you'll read just this first chapter - will say to these people, "I'm so tired of you showin' up every week with all of your religious trappings. It wears Me out. I don't need it." But then He invites them to examine where they stood.

So maybe tonight is the time for you to acknowledge that there's a relationship with God that He wants to have that you don't have, and it's not based upon you so much as what He's done for you. Because that's what Christmas is all about.

I heard someone say, on television the other night, "Christmas is just like a normal day at the office. You do all the work, and the fat guy in the suit gets all the credit." (Laughing) And I thought that was kind of interesting. So let's take it one step further. He did all the work. He just wants your life. Eternal life through faith in His Son and He invites you to come and consider where you stand.

Well, look at verse 18 because the first step in all of this is God's invitation for you to come. "Come now." He sends out the invitation. I don't know if you've ever heard of an office party or a family get-together, and you weren't invited and how that makes you feel. You should have been there; at least you think so. Well, you'll be glad to know that when it comes to Christmas, God makes the first move, and you're invited. You're on the VIP list. He wants you in the front row, which none of you seem to be - well, a few of you (Laughing); parents forced to sit in the front row with the kids. God wants to have you come. That's His heart. That's His desire. He would like you to come. He makes the first move.

What happened when Adam and Eve sinned? It was fine until the day they did. And then something happened - they became aware of their failure, they sewed some fig leaves together to try to cover their nakedness. And yet, when the LORD came into the Garden, they hid anyway - consciously aware that they were separated from God, that there was sin in their life. It's a pretty apt picture of man, who's been running ever since, hiding from God who keeps running after them. You aren't gonna get away unless you want to. Because God's heart is to redeem. He sent His Son to save. His desire is that all men would never be lost but all would be saved, that all would come to a saving knowledge of His Son.

So know that for yourself tonight, first - that God's heart towards you is He wants you in. You're invited. You're treasured by Him. He longs to give you life. His grace is at the ready. His arms are open wide.

We read in Galatians 4:4-6 that "when the fullness of the time had come," when everything was set, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" and daughters; that we could have "His Spirit within us, crying, '**Abba**,

Father!' " That's God's plan. He makes the first move. In God's timing, Jesus was sent. He's completely man, born of a woman. He's completely God, sent His Son. He was under the law which we couldn't keep. That's why He came. He could keep it. He's God, we're not. He came to redeem us.

And every promise that you will read in the Old Testament fulfills that sense of His desire to give you life. He wants you to be His kids. The word "redeem" is a pretty strong word in Hebrew. It means to "buy back" or to "pay a price as a ransom," and it must have been music to the ears of 60 million slaves under the Roman Empire in the days of Jesus. He came to bring us out. The word "adoption" comes from two Greek words put together - one means "son" and the other means "position." God sends His Son so you could stand in His place as God's Son. He could bring you in; He could make you His own. And when He does, something happens within. God sends His Spirit to live within you, and in your heart you begin to cry out for God. The word "**Abba**" is an Aramaic diminutive word that means "Daddy." Literally. Not father. "Daddy." A cry of love and dependency.

Isaiah points out that Jesus invites us to come first. So sometimes people go, "Well, I found the Lord." No you didn't. He wasn't lost; you were. He found you. When He went to little Zacchaeus' house, there in Luke 19, and He met with Zacchaeus, and He shared the Good News with him, and Zacchaeus opened his heart and received Christ into his life, Jesus stood on the porch of that house, and He said, "Today salvation has come to this house, he's a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (verses 9-10). That's His heart. He wants to find you. And maybe that's why you're here tonight - God's been hunting you down, and it's about time you give Him your life. Because let's face it - without Him, you're not being able to handle it very well, and you're not very prepared for what comes next. Which is a meeting with God, one-one-one. **Abba**, Father.

When God begins to work, you'll notice. The Bible tells us that He knocks on every door (Revelation 3:20). He seeks to have dinner with you, to have fellowship with you; that He comes knocking, if you will. He comes looking for you. He comes to find you. There's a Scripture in Isaiah that talks about, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). And there're times when God just kind of gets your heart and your attention, and He wants to speak to you, wants to bring you in. Paul knew that when he wrote to the Ephesians. He said, "While we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive in Christ"

(Ephesians 2:5). So, God's heart is to find you. That's the way He is. There's a story in Luke 15, I believe, where the Lord said if you have a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray (or you lose them), you leave the ninety-nine, and you go looking for the one that was lost. And when you find him, you put him on your shoulders, and you carry him home, and you invite everyone to come over and rejoice with you because you were lost, but now you're found. And the Lord said that's the kind of joy you'll find in heaven over one sinner that repents.

So look at verse 18 again. God says to the nation, to His people, to you and to me, "Come now. Come." He's come looking for you. And I'll tell you what - Christmas, at its core, is the absolute declaration that God has come looking for you.

Second of all, verse 18 says, "Let us reason together." God not only comes looking for you, He asks of you a rational response to your condition. I love the fact that God would actually say to a sinful man or to a sinful woman, "Let's talk this thing through. Let's look at you. Let's look at Me. Let's look at what you can do and what I can do. Let's decide whether this is going to work out or not; and what we should do to get you from where you are to where I am. Come now, let us reason together. Consider Me." And I love the fact that God calls us to listen and to reason and to not just emotionally respond. Our emotions can just go up one minute and down the next. He wants to deal with you in truth, in reality, to think things through. There're a lot of people that say they have faith, but they're no more than just emotional people, and the minute things go wrong, they don't know where to turn. They have no foundation for their hope. They'll tell you to not ask questions, don't try to figure things out. "All you have to do is believe." Well, that's ridiculous! And God doesn't call you to do that either. He wants you to consider your sinfulness and His promise. Consider the fact that he made a promise 700 years earlier to send His Son to die; and 700 years later, He showed up, and He died, and He rose, and He offers life. The veracity of the Scriptures, the fact that they are true from one generation to the next - everything is written, you can go back and verify as much as has been promised and fulfilled has yet to be fulfilled - is to give you a rationale and a reason to believe. God wants your faith to be genuine and based upon understanding. Look, we don't understand everything that God is doing. Isaiah says, in chapter 55:8 (same book), "My thoughts are not your thoughts, My ways beyond your finding out." However, there are things we can know about God, and He has made them clear to us. So your faith has to be reasonable - based on God's promises, invested in His track record of being 100% right all of the time, sustained when you get saved by a subjective

experience of truth as the Holy Spirit moves into your hearts to teach you. For eleven chapters Paul, in writing the book of Romans, will say, "Here's what you should know about God." And, for eleven chapters, he'll beat you over the head with theology, with doctrines, with deep, important things to learn about God. But it isn't until you get to chapter 12:1 that he then says to us, "Look, since you know all of these things, now present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, because that should be your reasonable service. And don't be conformed to this world. Let your mind be renewed. Prove those things that are right, that you might know what is that perfect will of God." But it was all about - know it first, then believe what you know. And I think, for us, that should be the same for us.

You should become convinced of the truth so that you might then believe in Jesus and you'll consider Him. How gracious of a God do we serve, that would send His only Son to die? That's Christmas. He puts His love on display. He calls upon us to trust in Him. As justice cries for the sword, mercy invites us to the conference table. Let's have a meeting. Let's talk about where you're headed, and what is the result of a life like that going to leave? The LORD said, in Isaiah 49:15 (since we're sticking in this book), "How can a woman forget her nursing child, how can she not have compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets," the LORD said, "I would never forget you." That's God's heart. We read, in Lamentations 3:31-33, that the LORD said to Israel, deep in sin, "I don't want to cast you off forever. I will show you mercy and a multitude of compassion. I don't inflict willingly. I don't want to grieve the children of men." He came to give life. So come. Let's consider God. What God has done for you. "My heart yearns for him," He would say in Jeremiah 31:20. "I want to have mercy upon him." So God offers this generation (and us) a complete pardon. "So let's settle our differences. You've got sin, I've got solutions. You have bondage, I can set you free. You need life, I have life. So come." He calls the meeting. He asks of you consideration.

"Though your sins" (verse 18) "are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In the discussion, God's answer to you and to me is that He will redeem us. Consider this offer from the Lord, this invitation to sinners. I think if you understood that God is only out to save that you wouldn't refuse anything He has to say. You read in Revelation 3:20, "He stands at the door and knocks, and if any man would hear that and open the door, He will come in, sup with him, give us life." We read that Jesus wants to be invited in, wants us to be able to be in fellowship with Him. But our condition, as we reason together with the Lord, is pretty grim. Our sins, in His eyes, are like

crimson. The word "crimson" means double-dyed. It's a word that talks about permeating a fabric, that it can't be removed. Israel had no way out. Their sin was unforgivable. Had God not paid the price, there was nothing they could have done to right the books. "Scarlet" is just a similar word that means deep-seated. It's interesting that the scarlet, crimson dyes that came from the scarlet worm species, the female, is an interesting kind of thing that history sets out before us in nature. Because a crimson worm, if you will, when it is ready to give birth to her young will attach her body to the base of a tree, the trunk of a tree, and so permanently that she'll never leave there. And when the eggs are deposited, her body protects the larvae until they're hatched, and this new life begins. But as the mother dies, this crimson fluid flows out of her body. It stains the wood. That's what they used to extract to make crimson dyes in clothes in those days, if you will. What a picture. Jesus comes, He dies on a cross, He sheds His blood so that He might make you clean. In fact, if you go to Psalm 22:6, the Lord said, "I am a worm, and no man," as He laments over being hung on a cross and left alone to die; abandoned, it seems, by the Father so that He might pay a price for us. He says, "I'm a reproach, I'm despised by all people." The word "worm" there is the exact same word as the word "crimson" here. He came to pour out His life.

So, "Let's reason together. I have a way out of your dilemma. I can bring snowfall of forgiveness. I can make the landscape white again." It's what David wrote in Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I can be clean; wash me, and I can be whiter than snow." Look, here's the dilemma. You're a sinner, and He's holy. You can't work your way out of the problem, but He can offer the solution. Religion has a different take on it. They say this - you can work your way out of this; just do better; straighten up; fly right. Well that'd be great if the wages of sin wasn't death (Romans 6:23). But the minute you sin, you die spiritually. You're gonna die physically. Now what? Now we have to turn to God's grace. Christmas celebrates the birth of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ - so named because He was going to come to do one thing: save His people from their sin (Matthew 1:21). That's God's solution. The name Jesus or *Yeshua* means "God is salvation." That's why He came. That's His purpose.

So here we are celebrating Christmas. But from God's perspective, it's huge! It's an invitation from God to have you sit and talk to Him about your life and His solution. His love and your dilemma. Your predicament and His redemption. And His grace and His mercy is conditional. It is dependent on two requirements, at least what we read, here in verses 19 and 20. And the two requirements are fairly



straight-forward. One is you have to be willing to agree with Him that this is the path you're going to need to do for life. And, number two, that willingness is going to have to be exhibited through obedience.

Which brings us to our third, and last, point - and this is it: God gives you a choice. He invites you to come. He wants you to honestly look at your dilemma and His promises. He wants you to compare those, look at the history, look at God's Word, look at the fulfillment, be convinced that He is indeed right. And then He wants you to make a decision. "If you are willing and you are obedient," we read in verse 19, "you're going to eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you're going to be devoured." And you can count on it because the LORD has said so. If you compare the "if" of verse 19 to the "but" of verse 20, the clauses that are there, it's exactly the choice that we have to make. And that's a choice that, by the way, you'll find throughout the Scriptures. When God was ready to take the children of Israel into the Land of Promise (in Deuteronomy 30:15-18), one of the last things out of Moses' mouth to the people before he died, was, "Look, I'm setting before you today life and death, good and evil. I'm telling you to love the LORD and walk in His ways and keep His commandments. You can multiply, and you can live, and the LORD will bless you. But if your heart turns away, and you just walk away, then you have to deal with the judgment of God." But make a good choice. Joshua would ask the people to make the same choice. "Choose you this day who you're going to serve. But as for me and my house, we're going to serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). You see, the bottom line to salvation is it now falls upon you. God has made the invitation. He's provided the way. He's given you enough evidence to believe. And then He puts the ball in your court and says, "Now, are you going to believe or not?" You can walk out of here tonight, angry, "I not gonna believe it." Well, that's fine. Not gonna have to answer to me. I have no idea about you. But God knows everything about you. But you should know that His heart is to save. His willingness is to forgive. He's provided all that's necessary. So, if you're not willing, you can't hardly blame Him when He is more than willing to give you life. And notice, at the end of verse 20 - to drive home that thought, He says, "God's Word is spoken."

To the Lord, religion is unacceptable. But so is a life of sin. And you can cover up a lot of sin by church-going and song-singing and Christmas-caroling. But let's be reasonable. Is your hope, tonight, in Jesus Christ? Is He the hope of your life? Is He the Lord of your life? Or, do you just go through the motions? You show up at church every once in a while. You always make Christmas and Easter - that

makes you an American Christian. (Laughing). You gotta choose. And to Him there's no religious persuasion that's going to impress Him. He wants a relationship with you. The amazing thing to me is that God gave you the power to make a choice. He opens your eyes to see so you can clearly choose. If you read the story about the prodigal son (Luke 15) - which I'm sure you know the story of - when he became of age, he made a choice. It was a bad one. He said to his dad, "I know you've got an inheritance for me. I'd like it early." And the father said, "That's really not the way we do things." "Well, no. I'd like it early." And the father gave it to him. He went out into the world, and he blew his money on riotous living and wasting it in the way that a lot of people do - get caught up in everything the world has to offer only to find out you have nothing to show for it. But he made another decision later on in life. He sat, eating food with the pigs - not exactly a kosher thing for a Jew to do - and he said, "My father's servants eat better and live better than I do. I know I can't ever be his son anymore. I've burned that bridge. But maybe I can go home and just go to work for him. My life would improve tremendously. I'm not worthy to be called his son, but I'd like to be a hired servant." And he went home, only to find his father searching the fields every day with his eyes, from a distance away, hoping he'd come home. The boy made another choice. He made a wrong choice; now he's going to make the right one. And when he arrived home, he found that the Lord and, in this case, the father was more than willing to receive him to himself. "My son which was lost has been found." That was his heart.

Christmas is about that. Make a list of it. Christmas is coming to your senses. Christmas is reasoning together with God. Christmas is agreeing that your sins are like crimson in His eyes, permanently damage you from inside out. There's no repair unless you get a new heart and a fresh start and Someone to pay the debt that sin requires. And then, if you call upon His name, and you place your hand in His hand, you can receive life because that's what God wants for you. It all comes back, though, to you. Are you willing to receive Him or not? Because tonight God is dreaming for you of a white Christmas so that your heart could be clean and pure with Him. It's the best offer goin'. It's the best present under the tree. That one will last forever, and you won't have to return it. (Laughing) And you can't afford it. Amen?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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