

Scarlet sins washed white as snow

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[0:00] Our reading today is from Isaiah 1, ending in chapter 2, on page 686 of the Church Bibles. Isaiah 1, verse 1.

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear me, you heavens, listen, earth, for the Lord has spoken. I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption.

They have forsaken the Lord. They have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion?

[1:09] Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head, there is no soundness, only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire, your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

Daughter Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city under siege. Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom. We would have been like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah. The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me?

Says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

[2:15] When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me.

New moons, Sabbaths and convocations, I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your new moon feasts and your appointed festivals, I hate with all my being.

They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you. Even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood. Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right.

Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord.

[3:12] Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land.

But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. See how the faithful city has become a prostitute.

See, she once was full of justice. Righteousness used to dwell in her. But now murderers. But now murderers. Your silver has become dross.

Your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves. They all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless.

The widow's case does not come before them. Therefore, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the mighty one of Israel declares, I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies.

[4:13] I will turn my hand against you. I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning.

Afterwards, you'll be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion will be delivered with justice, her pertinent ones with righteousness.

But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish. You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted.

You will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. You'll be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. The mighty man will become tinder, and his worker spark.

Both will burn together with no one to quench the fire. This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

[5:20] It will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Come, descendants of Jacob, let's walk in the light of the Lord. Thank you, Natasha, for reading for us. Let's pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we come to look at your word together this morning, we come from all sorts of different places.

Some of us find this very familiar. We've read the Bible before. We know a little bit about it. For others of us, it's very unfamiliar and very strange, and we can't imagine that such an ancient text has anything to say to us.

[6:33] Some of us are old. We've spent years in church listening to sermons. Others of us are young, and listening to sermons feels like a recipe for boredom. Some of us, Lord, have experienced the power of your spirit opening our eyes to your word and hearing you speak through ancient texts into our modern lives.

Others of us can't imagine such a thing happening today. And so, Lord, we need you. Take this, your word. Strange and unfamiliar as it might be, and speak to us, we ask.

Help us not just to understand it, but also to recognize its truth in our hearts. Lord, might you, as with a sharp sword, cut us this morning and expose us to your message of grace and truth.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now, before we look at Isaiah 1, I want us just to wind the clock back a little bit and do a little bit of history.

I want us to wind back to a character called Moses. You will have heard of Moses. Moses, you might remember, led God's people from slavery in Egypt and through the desert wilderness.

[7:48] And then, in the book of Deuteronomy, he stands with God's people on the edge of the Jordan, preaching his final sermons to them. Moses himself is not going to get to cross the Jordan River and enter to the Promised Land.

Joshua is going to do that after he has died. But before he dies, he gives them in these sermons some final instructions. And they are strange instructions.

He tells the people that when they get into the Promised Land, they are to go to the valley of Shechem, a valley that is overshadowed by two great mountains. And they are to send half the tribes up one mountain, the Mount Gerizim, and the other up the other mountain, the Mount Ebar. And when the people are arranged like that, the six tribes on Mount Gerizim are to shout blessings for God's people if they're obedient.

These are the blessings for obedience, says Moses. And he tells them what to say. And then the six tribes who are on Mount Ebar are to shout the curses for disobedience. This is what will happen if you disobey, says God.

[8:55] And Moses gives them the words to say as well. You can imagine it, can't you, in this sort of natural amphitheater of this great valley with these two mountains on either side. They are to listen to what essentially is like a kind of covenant renewal ceremony between God and his people.

After telling them to do that, Moses then teaches the people a song. And in the opening line to the song, he calls heaven and earth to witness the people's commitment to God. It's like heaven and

earth are getting to watch and witness this people commit themselves to God.

I think perhaps the best way to think about it is to think about it like a marriage. It's like a great sort of wedding between God and his people. The people are like the bride.

God is like the groom. And the heavens and the earth are the congregation who are gathered there to witness what is being promised, this great covenant. Now, keep that in mind and have a look at Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 2.

If you've not got your Bible open, open it again. Isaiah chapter 1 verse 2. Listen to what is said.

Hear me, you heavens. Listen, earth, for the Lord has spoken.

[10:11] I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. Now, this is hundreds of years after Moses' song and the great covenant renewal ceremony. But notice what is happening.

God is recalling the witnesses to the ceremony, if you like. He's saying to the heavens and earth, you know, you heard what these people promised. Now, come back and listen to what came of that. To pick up our wedding image, as if the groom re-invites the wedding guests back. He says, I want you to come back to church again, and I want you to now witness what has come of what you saw before.

I want you to hear about what she's done. I want you to hear about the broken promises and the unfaithfulness. If you keep your eyes on Isaiah 1, there's a here there in verse 2, and there's another here in verse 10.

The here in verse 10 is now not the heavens and the earth that are called to listen, but rather it's the people themselves. God now is no longer talking to the witnesses who he's regathered. He's talking to the people personally.

[11:18] Verse 10, look down at it. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah are two wicked cities destroyed by fire from heaven.

And in verse 9, God has said that the people have become like them. So now he calls them by that name. In the image of our kind of regathered wedding, it's as if the husband now having said to the congregation, listen, I want you to know what became of this wedding.

He now is turning to his bride and saying, look, I know what you've done. I know what you're like. I know where you go at night. I know what you do.

Listen as I tell you. Hear as I tell you what you've done to me. Then later in the chapter in verse 18, instead of the word hear, you find the word come.

Verse 18, as we looked up with the children, come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. This is an invitation from God, which is then echoed at the end of our passage in chapter 2, verse 5, when Isaiah calls the people, come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

[12:31] And here the instruction is, listen, says God, I want you to engage with me. I want us to sort this out. I don't want us to leave like we are now. I want us to resolve this issue, he says.

Come, let's sort it out. So that is our passage this morning, okay? Hear, hear, come. Three words. Hear, hear, and come.

And what we're going to do is take a closer look at each of those three words. So let's think about the first, hear. Hear, number one. As you look down at those verses, you can see that God's case against his people is pretty simple.

Look down again at verse 2. Hear me, you heavens. Listen, earth, for the Lord has spoken. I reared children and brought them up, but they've rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. Do you understand what's going on? God's case is that despite all that he has done for his people, despite rescuing them from Egypt, calling them and rearing them like a father and a child, still they have behaved worse than an oxen and a donkey, who at least know you shouldn't bite the hand that feeds you.

[13:45] So despite the fact that they are, in verse 4, a nation, a people, and children to the Lord, they are, says Isaiah, loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, and given to corruption. Now, the details of what they've done, we're going to find out later.

But notice what comes first. Their first problem is they've forgotten who God is, and therefore they've forgotten who they are. The people have forgotten they belong to God, rescued them, that he brought them up, that they were his, that he loved them and cared for them, that he provided for

them and watched over them.

They've become like, and I don't look in any one particular direction, but they've become like that child who lives in a flat, that they don't rent the flat, they use water that they don't pay for, they eat food that they did not buy, they eat off plates that they never wash, and they don't believe in parents.

They're as if they don't exist. Or as if they do exist, well, they're probably not that important anyway. But they are living off their hospitality every moment of every day. And that, says God, is what my people are like.

I've provided everything for them, I've given them all that they need, but they ignore me completely. And notice God is not silent while they've been doing that. Look at verse 5, and you'll hear that God has punished the people for their sin.

[14 : 59] They have open sores in verse 6 as a result, that they've been conquered by other nations. This has not been working out well. Their cities have been burnt. Their fields have been stripped of crops by foreign armies that have invaded.

And at the end of verse 8, God pictures his people like a hut in a cucumber field. Now you might think, well, a hut in a cucumber field? What on earth is a hut in a cucumber field? It's actually a really brilliant picture.

I don't know whether you know about picking cucumbers, I don't know much about it, but it's not something apparently you do for long. The cucumber season is a very short season in the summer, only for a few weeks.

So if you're picking cucumbers, you do not build a shed that's going to last you months and months and months. You only want something that's just going to keep the sun off for a few weeks while you're in that field picking cucumbers. And so the people, says God, they're no longer a fortress city.

They're like a kind of wobbly allotment shed that's just put up to last the summer and will fall down in the winter. Now, I wonder what you make of all this. Even as I'm preaching, I can sort of imagine you thinking, well, this is just so weird.

[16 : 08] I'm not used to listening to this kind of language. And there is a challenge to understanding the words, isn't there? It's also written before Christ. And so we're going to have to do some work to understand it because it's written to the nation of Judah and not directly to the church.

There's a challenge there. But I think the point is still very simple. It's this, that there is an awful possibility for God's people to forget who God is and therefore forget who they are.

That's the awful possibility. The danger for Judah, the danger for our church, the danger for you, the danger for me, is not simply that we are tempted into wicked actions, but that ahead of those wicked actions, we are lured into misunderstanding God and therefore ourselves.

We forget God. We forget that he is the one to whom we belong. We forget that these lives are his, that he saved us, that he cares for us, that he watches over us. And the truth is that our battle with sin, be that pride or anger or alcohol or lust or worry or gossip, really that is a battle for who I am and who God is and what my life is for.

The temptation to unfaithfulness is really the temptation to say, I am not God's child. This is not his world. I don't belong to him. I can ignore him. I went this week to the launch of a new book called *The Stories We Live By*.

[17 : 41] And the author was saying that often what shapes our lives is not so much a set of list of things that we have decided we're going to believe, but unconscious stories that we sort of assimilate about what life is for.

These stories are told to us in all sorts of different ways. You know, stories like you should look after number one. You do you. You must be true to yourself. You can do anything that you put your mind to.

All the stories essentially have us at the center of them. And God, if he's there, well, he's a bit part player. He's a kind of extra that comes on in the last scene, maybe just for a few moments, but doesn't really play any significant parts.

That's it here, isn't it? It is not a true story. It's a false story about their identity, about who they are. God is no longer the director, the writer, the producer.

He's an irrelevance as they go on with their lives. Now, I think we see that in lots of different ways in all of our lives. Anxious thoughts about the future rely on a false story about what God is like and

how involved he is in our lives.

[18:52] My fears about what might be, my regrets for what was, all of those reduce the role of God in our lives. But so does temptation. Temptation says that God doesn't see, God doesn't care, God's not bothered, God's not good.

He's spoiling our fun. That's why, isn't it, if you're a Christian this morning, the most useful thing you can say to yourself in the face of temptation, whatever that temptation is, is not just, I should not do this.

You should say to yourself instead, this is not who I am. That's what you need to say. This is not who God is. Perhaps you wouldn't call yourself a Christian this morning.

I think if that's you, this is a really helpful thing for you to hear. Because this is what the Bible says is wrong with the world. You might assume, if you're not a Christian, that what the Bible says is wrong with the world is that we're all naughty and we all do bad stuff.

Now, the Bible does talk about morality. But ahead of all of that, the Bible's message is that he has given you, whoever you are, he has given you breath.

[19:58] He has given you life. He has made you for him. He has put you in this world that he made, that you might live for his glory. You are his creature. You are his child.

And your problem isn't just that you are immoral. Your problem is that ahead of that, you live as if you belong to yourself and not to him. And in effect, verse 5 of Isaiah 1 says to you and to me, how is that working out for you?

How is it working out? How are you getting on with that? Because the trouble for Israel in forgetting who God is and who they are is that they kept bumping into reality. And it hurts.

You know, you can only fake the universe for so long. You know, imagine a child who thinks that they're a bird and they flap their arms as if they could fly. They can only do it for so long before they face the harsh reality of what?

The flaw. Gravity. Concrete. And it comes as a rude awakening. Oh, maybe I'm not a bird. I cannot fly. So for you, if you live in this world as if the story has you at the center and you are the main person, you will at some point bump into reality, which is that God is at the center.

[21:13] He will hold you to account and you will face him one day, just as I will. That's problem number one, the first thing to hear. The first thing to hear is that God's people have forgotten who they are because they've forgotten who God is.

The second thing to hear is verse 10. Verse 10. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. In the beginning of Isaiah 1, Isaiah gives you a bit of historical context to all of this book.

Isaiah's book, he tells you, spreads the reigns of several of Judah's kings. Now, these guys are significant characters. We're going to meet them in our series on the way through. Isaiah reigned for about 52 years, depending on how exactly you count it.

And Hezekiah oversaw a renaissance of God's people. And temple worship was continuing throughout this time. Sacrifices were being made. The priesthood was functioning. They were doing the right things.

But all was not well. In fact, as you look down at the verses, you realize that God doesn't like their temple worship. In verse 10, He calls them to hear. And in verse 11, He says, listen, I've had enough.

[22:20] I've had enough of your worship. I have no pleasure in your sacrifices. He tells them, verse 13, look down at verse 13. The language in verse 13 is so direct. Stop bringing meaningless offerings, He says.

Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbaths, and convocations. I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your new moon feasts and your appointed festivals, I hate with all my being. They've become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. I don't think you can imagine any straighter or more direct words from God, can you? I hate them with all my being, He says.

What a damning verdict. Why? What is so wrong with them? Well, it's not that they're doing them in the wrong way. Notice that. They're really serious about doing things in the right way.

It's rather the problem is not with what they're doing. The problem is with their hearts. They're hypocrites. The hands they spread out in prayer in verse 15 are covered in the blood of innocent people.

[23:21] They make sacrifices for their sin, but they do not turn from their sin. So God tells them to stop doing wrong in verse 16. Start doing right, verse 17.

Do justice, he says. Stick up for the weak and the vulnerable. We imagined, didn't we, at the beginning, this is like a conversation between a husband and a wife. And having spoken to the wedding guests, the witnesses in verses 1 to 9, he's now looking his wife in the eyes.

And he says to her, listen, you give me such generous birthday presents. You know, you always take me out for meals. But honestly, I hate them.

I'd rather not have another meal out with you. I'd rather you didn't give me anything for my birthday.

Because I know as soon as the birthday party is over, you're off to sleep with somebody else.

I know as soon as we leave the restaurant, you're on your phone, texting somebody else. And because you do that, the gifts, they just feel like insults.

[24 : 28] Now notice that these two here's are connected. Here that you've forgotten who I am and you've forgotten who you are. And here that you're a hypocrite and your worship is just skin deep.

They're connected, aren't they? It's because they have forgotten their identity as God's people that they treat others so poorly. Think about it. If they forget they are God's people, if they're no longer part of God's people, who is everybody else?

Who is everybody else? Well, they're not brothers and sisters, are they? They're not fellow citizens of God's people. Instead, they're just obstacles in the way. Instead, they're people to be exploited on the way to the top.

If they're the center of the story, then everybody else is just in the way. They're not worthy of their attention. They get nothing from them. So amazingly, the evidence of people forgetting who God is and forgetting who they are is that they treat others around them really poorly.

And again, it's not hard, is it, to see the danger of this in our own lives. It's possible, isn't it, to come to church, to lift our hands in praise of God, to say amen, to take the Lord's Supper, and God to say, I wish you didn't bother.

[25 : 42] I wish you didn't come. I hate you being here. Not because we're doing it wrong, not because we're not wearing the right clothes, or we're not saying the right words, but because as soon as we get out of this room, we're living a contradiction.

And we can be really specific, can't we, because Isaiah's concern is not general, it's specific. His concern is it's the way you treat others, especially the poor and the needed.

You know, we might say with our lips in church that we love God and that we're part of his people, but then in our actions in the week, we'll say, well, I do what I want. Get out of my way. And if it works for us individually, it works for us corporately as well.

So many churches can think that the whole game is having right doctrine. That's not it, is it? It doesn't matter if we have sound doctrine and don't care for one another, especially the most needy and the vulnerable amongst us.

That's super challenging. Don't think that God loves churches where the preaching is sound, but the hungry among them go unfair. Or the lonely are never visited.

[26 : 49] Or the poor are never provided for. Where love is not genuine. You know, sound but cold is not a description that we want for our church. So those are the first two here's.

Here, you've forgotten your identity. And here, you're a hypocrite. Finally then, come. Come. I want you to imagine that you've been invited back to this wedding, right?

Imagine you're one of the guests. And you come back. You've received this invitation from the groom to re-witness this wedding. And the groom is at the front. And first thing he does is he addresses you and says, I want you to know what my wife is really like.

Please listen as I tell you what she does. And then he turns to his wife and he says, I know what you do. I know where you've been. I know what you like. What do you imagine is coming next, right?

You imagine, don't you, that the husband is going to get the divorce papers out and start throwing them at his bride. That's what you imagine is going to happen. And that's what maybe you imagine is going to happen in Isaiah. This is the kind of gotcha moment, isn't it?

[27 : 48] When you expect to see the bride's face all kind of, I'm undone. But instead, see what happens. Verse 18. Come. Let's settle the matter.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. What extraordinary grace. What an amazing offer. Scarlet red sins washed clean as white snow. Blood red hands washed of their guilt.

It's followed, if you look down, by a poem from verses 21 to 26, which begins and ends with the words faithful city, as the offer of restoration is explained to the people how God will chase their sin out of them.

And really, in a way, these verses read like you're back in the valley of Shechem with the blessings for obedience ringing out in verses 24 to 27 and the curses for disobedience in verses 28 to 31.

[28 : 52] And it's like they're getting a second chance. Listen, here it is again. If you love me and follow me, these are the blessings. If you rebel, these are the curses.

Now, you might hear that and think, well, that's enough, isn't it? Wicked people offered a second chance by a gracious God. I mean, perhaps that's what you think you need this morning. Perhaps you're here this morning thinking, I really just want a second chance.

I'm here, tomorrow's a new day. I'm going to wipe the slate clean. I'm just going to try again. But if you're really honest, you'll know that you need more than that.

In fact, if you've read any of the rest of the Old Testament, you'll know that the hundreds of years of history between Moses and Isaiah, they had lots of second chances. This isn't really second chance.

This is more like chance 273. Yet none of them work. Because continually, the people rebel. So much so that the washing white of the scarlet sins is all great.

[29 : 51] But if it's conditional of the obedience of verse 19, as it seems to be, the people are stuffed, aren't they? Israel have never managed that, not in all their years of history. And you and I are no exception, are we?

Which is why we need to notice that Isaiah has more to say. That the come of verse 18 is echoed twice in verses 1 to 5 of chapter 2. Let me just read those verses to you again.

Look down at verse 1 of chapter 2. This is what Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

It will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways so that we might walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.

[30 : 51] They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Now I know that we're coming towards the end, and there is work to do to understand these verses, but keep your eyes on them because there is great reward in understanding these verses. Notice what Isaiah is saying.

There are days coming, he says, which will be called the last days. The last days. And in those last days, we are told, the mountain of the temple will be lifted high so that it is exalted above the other hills.

In other words, the Mount Sinai, where the law is given, will be overshadowed. Mount Gerizim and Ebal of the blessings and the curses, they will be overshadowed by this temple mountain. And it will be so high and spectacular that not only will God's people be drawn to it, but the nations will come as well.

Many peoples, verse 3, they will say, come, let's go, there's something happening there, we must see it. And notice what's happening from this new mountain. God is speaking. Verse 3.

[31 : 59] He's there with them. His law and his word are going out. He's teaching his ways in such a way that the people are able to walk in his ways, verse 3. And Isaiah switches out the image. And in verse 4, this new temple mountain that's raised up and drawing the nations turns out to be a he who is also God's word, someone who will settle the national disputes, bring peace and banish war.

Now, of course, Isaiah is saying more than he knows here. The coming he who is like the temple, who comes with a new covenant, who comes like a new priest, who comes with a new word from God, one who will eclipse the blessings and the curses of Ebal and Gerizim, where no longer will the promises be in the balance of Israel's shaky obedience, but in the steady hands of God himself.

Who's he talking about? Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. This high hill in Jerusalem turns out to have a cross on the top of it. The new place to meet with God, where you are washed clean of your crimson sins.

And not only that, you are given a new heart to love him and live for him. Your life is transformed and your sin is washed away through the sacrifice of the Son.

Now, Isaiah will have loads more to say about this, but you see what's happening here. You know, you and I have forgotten who we are. We're living as if life is all about us. We've trodden on the weak and the vulnerable because we've considered ourselves to be more important than them.

[33:35] And what does God say? He doesn't say, go away, I don't want anything more to do with you. He says, come. Come and I will wash you clean and make you new. Come and I will deal with your sin.

Last Saturday, Andrew and I were knocking some doors locally. We knocked on the door of a Muslim man who told us that he couldn't believe in the gospel because really if something's worth having, it's worth working for.

That was his objection. I don't like this talk about grace, about God's gift, because it makes it unimportant. Right? If something is worth having, it must be something that we work towards achieving.

But he was wrong, wasn't he? Because actually the hardest thing to do in the world is not try harder. You know that, don't you? The hardest thing to do in the world is not try harder.

What's the hardest thing in the world to do? The hardest thing in the world is to admit that you cannot do it. That's the hardest thing in the world. To humbly accept that no matter what you do or how hard you try, you cannot fix it in your own strength.

[34:47] That is harder than any moral effort you will try. To humbly hear this invitation of God when he says, come. Come to me. I will solve it for you.

Come and be my bride again. I will love you and wash you clean and give you a new heart that longs to love me and live for my glory. Come. Come to me.

Let's pray that the Lord might help us to hear his invitation. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we've listened to your word this morning, we know that we do not deserve to hear the invitation of verse 18.

Or the transformation of chapter 2. But we know that we deserve to be sent away by you, not drawn in by you.

So how we thank you for your grace and your mercy. And I pray that each of us this morning would have the courage and the humility to accept that no matter how hard we try, we cannot fix it in our own strength.

[36:10] And we need you to transform us and to forgive us. And we thank you that there is a mountain that is higher than all of our efforts. It's the mountain of the cross where Jesus died for our sins and offers us new life.

And so we come to him and we say thank you. In his name. Amen. Amen.