



Study 2 – Send Me! Reading: Isaiah 6

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Studies from the book of Isaiah
 by Peter J Blackburn
1. Whiter than the Snow
 Reading: Isaiah 1.10-20

Phew! What a hot day! And you want to talk about snow? Up in the tropics we have trouble even thinking of a climate colder than the air-conditioner in the local store!

Yet, from our earliest reading of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, snow has somehow been a symbol of purity and innocence. It has also been a standard of whiteness to which all the best washing powders should aspire.

I was reading recently that scientists have discovered that every snowflake has a tiny piece of dust at its core. Yes, every snowflake has a “dirty heart.” It came to me as an offensive thought. How dare they suggest that about the very standard of purity and whiteness! Yet apparently it is so.

What a strong contrast between the heap of filthy rags at one end of the paper mill and the pure and spotless white paper at the other! But what a trial the rags go through before they emerge in this new form! Torn to pieces and ground to pulp, bleached with chloride of lime until all stains are removed, washed over and over; submitted to another bleaching by the action of chlorine and alum; washed again, until the pulp is white as cream or snowflakes! Caught upon a wire cylinder, after the severe shaking by the Fourdrinier process which crosses the fibres and gives compactness and firmness to the fabric; and then passed between and around the hot surfaces which makes the paper smooth and even...

Something is wrong!

The prophecies of Isaiah are about the southern kingdom of Judah and its capital Jerusalem. His prophecy is called a “vision” – the prophet “saw” what the Lord was saying to him (1.1).

Isaiah knew well the city of Jerusalem and its temple and royal court. By this time the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was in its final years. The Northern Kingdom fell in 722 BC to the Assyrians who were endeavouring to conquer the entire area. Isaiah wrote specifically for the Southern Kingdom (Judah), which would fall to the Babylonian Empire a little more than 100 years later in 586 BC.

They are described as rebellious children who do not know or understand their Lord (vv. 2-3). Guilty and corrupt, they have turned away from the Lord (v. 4). Head, heart – their whole body, in fact – is injured, afflicted, without soundness (vv. 5-6). Devastation affects the whole countryside – there is no safe place for any one any more (vv. 7-9).

Reflect:

- How do we view our own country and the times in which we live? What comparisons seem so obvious? In what ways was the situation very different? Is the problem all “out there”, or do we also find it “in here”?
- How is it possible to perceive the evils of the society in which we live without becoming obsessively negative and withdrawn?

Read: Isaiah 1.10-20.

“Hear the word of the Lord...” There is no escape from judgment and yet no escape from hope without hearing the word of the Lord.

The people were still diligently keeping up with their religious observances – sacrifices, burnt offerings, blood of bulls and lambs and goats, worship in the temple, incense, special times and seasons...

Yet the Lord is “fed up” with it all – “I have had more than enough...”, “I have no pleasure...”, “I cannot bear...”, “my soul hates...” “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen” (v. 15).

That seems a rather extreme situation. Why should it be so? “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, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (vv. 15d,16).

It is some eight centuries later that we hear Jesus saying to the woman of Samaria, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4.23-24).

The Lord is interested in our hearts and lives. The formalities of our worship are an offense to him if they do not spring from hearts and lives that love him and love to do his will.

The Lord was calling his people to true repentance. They had to “stop doing wrong and learn to do right.”

Reflect:

- What do we do to show that we believe in the Lord? To what extent are we caught up in formality without a right and true spirit in our worship? What would the Lord say to us?

Whiter than Snow

“Come now, let us reason together,” 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” (Is. 1.18).

“God then invited the sinful people to come to their senses (Is. 1.18) and admit they had been wrong in their attitudes and practices. The invitation ‘Come now, let us reason together’ was more than a call for negotiations between the people and God. The word ‘reason’ is a law term used of arguing, convincing, or deciding a case in court. The people were to be convinced by their argumentation with God that He was right and they were wrong about their condition” (John A Martin).

God is indeed right in his diagnosis of human sin – in individuals and in the nation. It is therefore reasonable and appropriate to receive and accept his promise of forgiveness and cleansing. It is foolishness to refuse his gracious offer (note vv. 19,20).

Living after the fulfilment of God’s promises in Jesus Christ, we recall 1 John 1.8-9 – “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

- Think again about our society and world. Is the gospel still relevant to the people of our time? How do we get it out in today’s world?