

Fact Sheet for “A Verse for All People”

Isaiah 1:18

Pastor Bob Singer
08/31/2014

Isaiah is the most quoted book in the NT. It is prophetic (with predictions of things yet future and predictions of things that were amazingly fulfilled). It is highly applicational. We sing songs based on some of its words. We are encouraged regularly by famous passages. But it is a book that is not well read

Our church is active in evangelism, and part of that is CEF. The CEF Wordless Book song lyrics read...

My heart was dark with sin
Until the Savior came in
His precious blood I know
Has washed me white as snow
And in God's Word I'm told
I'll walk the streets of gold
To grow in Christ each day
I'll read my Bible and pray

But, does the Bible say our sins are dark? Yes (1 John 1:5-7). However, the Bible does give a different color to sin (Isaiah 1:18). This doesn't make the Wordless Book wrong. We are simply using a different illustration of sin's color, one that fits our culture better. When we think of sin we think of soiled (dark) and clean (white). When the readers of Isaiah thought of sin they thought of temple sacrifice (blood, scarlet, crimson) and purity (white). The Wordless Book *is* an effective evangelistic tool, but Isaiah 1:18 has broader application.

Let's look closer at Isaiah 1:1-20. It was not a good time for God's people. The 12 tribes were split. Idolatry was rampant. Assyria would soon conquer and take captive the northern 10 tribes (Israel/Samaria)... and they were breathing down the neck of Jerusalem (Judah).

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

Don't miss this verse! It will be very important as we get into later portions of Isaiah. The kings mentioned here were all the kings of Judah who reigned during the time Isaiah prophesied. It was during Hezekiah's time that Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. Judah would not be taken captive by Babylon until 586 B.C. (136 YEARS LATER). Then the prophet Jeremiah would remain in the land, while Daniel and his friends would be taken captive into Babylon. But they weren't even born yet. Notice too that Isaiah's ministry was primarily to Judah, not Israel.

Let's see what Isaiah has to say (read Isaiah 1:2-9). God's judgment was upon them.

The Apostle Paul would later quote this verse in Romans 9:29. In Romans 9-11 Paul expresses his grief that so many in Israel would not believe the gospel while so many Gentiles were receiving Christ. Isaiah spoke about the few survivors left in Judah and Jerusalem. Paul used Isaiah's words as an illustration of the relatively few Jews that had come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Read Isaiah 1:10-15. Religious form without heart obedience was and is something God cannot endure. Their prayers were ineffective because of their sin. Read Isaiah 1:16-17.

Isaiah 1:18

¹⁸ **"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 like crimson,
they shall become like wool.**

To whom was this verse addressed... to the unsaved of Judah... or to everyone in Judah? EVERYONE, saved and unsaved! To *reason together* with the Lord would involve confession and repentance.

Cleansing for sin does not *only* happen the moment we believe the gospel and accept Jesus Christ (Messiah), God the Son, as the complete sacrificial payment for our sins... This cleansing *also* takes place for those who *already* have believed the gospel, have *already* asked Jesus to be their Savior, but who have messed up (sinned) and are clearing that up with God on a day by day, moment by moment basis. I quoted 1 John 1:5-7 earlier. John is writing to believers about their continual walk with God and goes on to say...

ESV **1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And, Isaiah doesn't stop there (read Isaiah 1:19-20). Sin has real consequences in life!

What are some of the things we learn from Isaiah's words here?

- 1 – God is not pleased with religious ceremony without heart obedience.
- 2 – Our sin can make our prayers ineffective.
- 3 – Sin has real consequences in life.
- 4 - The call to confession and repentance in Isaiah 1:18 is for *both* the unsaved and the saved.

This verse has so very many applications in life. Let me suggest just one this morning.

All of us interact with children and young people on some level. If you ask them today to define sin they will usually mention the big things like murder and bank robbery. But they will often miss the small things like calling their siblings names, or dishonoring their parents in their Facebook posts. There is a growing tolerance in our society for what are viewed as smaller sins... to the point that they are not even viewed as sins. We have a call from God to make a real positive impact on our children and young people by helping them...

...to define sin the way God defines sin and not by the way our society defines it
...to understand that God is not pleased with mere churchiosity without heart obedience
...to understand that our sin can short circuit the effectiveness of their prayers
...to see that sin has real consequences in life
...and to memorize Isaiah 1:18

Isaiah 1:18

¹⁸ **"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 like crimson,
they shall become like wool.**

We can do this around the dinner table; in our casual conversations; during Sunday School classes and youth groups; on vacations; when they are processing something from school, on television, or something personal.

This is only one of many applications of this verse. I challenge you to think of others.