

The King in His Beauty

Isaiah 33:1-24

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We are on the sixth and final poem of the “Woes” that Isaiah wrote. These six poems run from Isaiah 28 to Isaiah 33. They are summonses to trust God. They are warnings mixed with promises.

Since I am really good at ignoring warnings, as I mentioned in last week’s sermon, I will tell you one more foolish warning I ignored that almost cost me dearly.

Some of you know I went to the ER at the end of June. My blood pressure was 200 over 140 something. Here are the events that happened before I had to go in the hospital. First, I had a medical treatment in mid-June, and the nurse told me my blood pressure was too high. It was 158 over 95. Then Stacy and I went to Texas to check on our parents, and when I came back, I had two annual checkups. At the first checkup, it was 180 over 90 something. They told me it was too high, so when I go to my checkup the next day, I need to make sure the doctor knows it has been running high.

So, I go in for my next annual checkup the next day, and it is too high again. The doctor finished my checkup and expressed concern over my blood pressure. The nurse checked my blood pressure again at the end of the checkup, and it was the same. So, they sent me across the street to my General Practitioner. Well, he rushed me in and did all kinds of tests on my heart and prescribed a new medication to lower my blood pressure, but it did not bring it down.

I picked up a blood pressure machine at Walmart when I was picking up my prescription. After checking my blood pressure several times, my son, Mac, dropped by the house just to visit. He walked in when I was taking my blood pressure. It was 190 over something bad, and he panics. I just blow it off his concern, but he persuades me to go to the ER because I had all of the classic symptoms of a heart attack or stroke.

When we got to the ER, my blood pressure was 200 over 140 something. Long story short, they kept me in the hospital for two days trying to get my blood pressure down and take care of the massive headache that accompanied the high blood pressure.

Here is the deal, taking your blood pressure is one of the ways we determine if our health is good or bad. High blood pressure is a warning sign that precedes a heart attack or a stroke. If you heed this warning sign and the other ones that accompany it, then you will most likely be able to avoid a heart attack or stroke. However, if you ignore these warning signs, then most likely, you will wreck your health.

I was fooling myself because I kept blowing off the high blood pressure thinking I was okay because I took medication and exercised every day. I had duped myself into thinking I was okay until the final warning signs got my attention. Going to the ER was the last resort for me. In essence, I had hit bottom.

Many of us are like that. We ignore physical warning signs until it is too late. Yet, here is the deal. Sadly, we don’t just do that with our physical health; we will also ignore the warning signs of our spiritual health.

When the spiritual warning signs come into our lives, we often do what I did with the high blood pressure—we blow it off. We think we will be okay. We tell ourselves that we attend worship services and say some short prayers, so we are okay. We fail to miss the call to repent and genuinely turn to Jesus until we have gone too far. We fail to listen to the Spirit of God telling us that something is wrong and to listen to the warning signs.

Usually, when we get to this point, we have gone so far from God that we do not know how to come back to Jesus, or we are too embarrassed to come back. We don’t want to admit we have made a mess of our lives. We don’t want to admit we were wrong. Do you ever do that?

If you do that, I’ve got good news for you. Isaiah 33 was written to show sinners how to return to God. It was written to show us God renews sinners who return to Him. Pastor and scholar Ray Ortlund says:

Isaiah 33, therefore, is for people who haven’t been trusting God. It’s for people who are seeing in a new way that they can’t treat God as a rabbit’s foot and experience his power; they can’t marginalize God and live in the flow of his blessing. Isaiah 33 is for people who’ve given

themselves to all the wrong things and are only now seeing that their lives are fast becoming a lost opportunity. And the message of Isaiah 33 is this: It is too late to think that you really honor God. But even now, if you'll come to him just as you are, "your eyes will behold the king in his beauty" (v. 17).¹

So, Isaiah 33 is for people who have made a mess of their lives. It is for people who want to come to Jesus for the first time, or if they are a wayward Christian, who want to return to Jesus for the one-hundredth time.

Isaiah 33 is a chapter that shows how God's people were returning to God. Yet, they were not turning to God because He was their great desire and love of their lives. They were not returning because He was their great Fountain of All Good. They were not returning because they treasured God.

Instead, they were turning to God because He was their last resort. They had not lived lives of turning from sin and turning to God. Isaiah 33 is a last-ditch effort to avoid the coming disaster. However, here is the good news—God lovingly received them anyway.²

Let me explain the setting of Isaiah 33. Hezekiah was king of Judah at this time. His father, King Ahaz, who ruled before him, had made a treaty with Assyria to keep them from invading. Yet, when Hezekiah took over for his father, and he became king, he trusted the Lord enough to break the treaty with Assyria. Then Assyria responded as any tyrannical nation would—they invaded Judah.

When this happened, Hezekiah wavered in his faith, and he stripped all of the gold and silver from the temple and gave it to Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, as a tribute. He was hoping it would buy him off. Sennacherib accepted the payment and said he would not invade, but he double-crossed Hezekiah. He invaded anyway.

Now, Sennacherib and his army had swept through the rural regions of Judah, destroying the villages and killing people. This massive army finally had arrived at the gates of Jerusalem and was preparing to lay siege to the city.

The scene would have been like a scene from Lord of the Rings when Sauron's orc army was at the gates of Minas Tirith. It was a vast army set on the complete destruction of Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem would have looked over their walls and seen the deadliest army that has walked the face of the earth. They would have seen thousands of soldiers armed to the teeth and ready to raze the city to the ground and kill anyone in their path.

At that point, King Hezekiah realizes he has made a massive mistake and sinned against God. He made a deal with the devil, and payday had come. He realized he had turned away from God and had greatly offended Him. Now, Judah had nowhere to turn and no one to call for help.

King Hezekiah had finally hit bottom, and it was at this point he realized the only hope he and his people had left was the grace of God. *Turning to God was Judah's last resort.* Here is the good news. Although they turned to God as a last resort, God did not leave them hanging. He still rescued them.

They had ignored all the warnings up to this point, and now when they were at their lowest point and had nowhere else to turn, they turned to God, and He lovingly received them and delivered them.

There is a major difference between Isaiah 33 and the previous five poems in Isaiah 28-32. Isaiah 33 is a promise of a glorious deliverance instead of a warning. The warning of "Woe" in Isaiah 33 is not for Judah but for Assyria.

The point of Isaiah 33: Isaiah 33 teaches us how to return to God and be renewed by His grace.

Let's work through this beautiful chapter and learn how we can return to and be renewed by our King Jesus. I want to point you to three steps of returning to God and the two promises that follow those steps.

I. Believe the Promise of Deliverance by the King (v. 1)

*Woe, you destroyer never destroyed,
you traitor never betrayed!*

¹ Ray Ortlund, Jr. *Preaching the Word Series: Isaiah*, Editor: R. Kent Hughes, 188.

² Ibid, 187.

*When you have finished destroying,
you will be destroyed.
When you have finished betraying,
they will betray you.*

Isaiah 33 begins with “Woe,” but it is not a woe like the other woes. This woe is actually a promise of deliverance because it describes the beginning of the great reversal that God is about to initiate.

Verse 1 says the *destroyer will be destroyed, and the betrayer will be betrayed*. The destroyer and betrayer are Assyria. Assyria had destroyed many nations and even destroyed the rural region surrounding Jerusalem. They had also betrayed Hezekiah by taking the temple's gold and silver as tribute to not invade, but then they invaded anyway. Now they finally come under God's judgment, and God's judgment of Assyria was Judah's deliverance.

In v. 1, the great reversal begins. It really describes how death will be destroyed. Think about it; death was camped outside of the walls of Jerusalem. But when we get to the narrative portion of this story, we see in Isaiah 37 that death was destroyed by God Himself. This was the promise they were called to believe in Isaiah 33. Believing in God's promises was their last hope. It was their last resort.

Likewise, we are called to believe in the promise of deliverance. But some of you may be asking the old R. C. Sproul question: “*Delivered from what? Saved from what? I don't see an army encamped around me. I have problems, but my life is not in danger. From what do I need to be delivered?*” That's a great question, and it must be answered for us to love and appreciate the salvation God has given us.

Here is what we are delivered from, or we can also say from what we are saved. If you are not a Christian, here is your situation: Because of your sin, the wrath of God and eternity in hell are at the gate of your life. It seeks to knock down the gates of your life in order to steal, kill and destroy your life. What's worse, if you die separated from Jesus Christ, then you will spend eternity in hell under God's holy wrath.

But God has made a way for you to be delivered. He has provided salvation for you in Christ. Jesus' death on the cross is the death of death for you if you turn from your sin and trust Him. His death was your death because He died in your place and for your sin.

Here is the deal, there is no other way to be saved. There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. Jesus is the only way to the Father in Heaven. He is the Truth of God, and He is the very Life of God given to us. You see, Jesus is not a last resort. He is the only resort.

So, the first step of returning to God is to *believe the promise of deliverance in Christ*.

II. Confess your faith in the King (vv. 2-6)

Now, as we see our deliverance, we confess our faith in the One who has provided our salvation. Look in v. 2:

²*Lord, be gracious to us! We wait for you.
Be our strength every morning
and our salvation in time of trouble.*

Now we have come full circle. Look back at Isaiah 30:18. Remember this verse from two sermons ago. I want to read it again, but I actually like the ESV's translation of this text better than the CSV's. Listen to the ESV's rendering of Isaiah 30:18:

*Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore, he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.*

The Lord was waiting to be gracious to His people because He was waiting for them to realize they needed Him. Now in Isaiah 33:2, they have come full circle, and they make their confession of faith for which the Lord had been waiting.

But let's keep going and look at vv. 3-6:

³ *The peoples flee at the thunderous noise;
the nations scatter when you rise in your majesty.*
⁴ *Your spoil will be gathered as locusts are gathered;
people will swarm over it like an infestation of locusts.*
⁵ *The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high;
he has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.*
⁶ *There will be times of security for you—
a storehouse of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge.
The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure.*

In these verses, we learn that the Lord has judged Assyria, and Judah has seen this judgment upon that nation. Now we see the exaltation of God in the deliverance of His people and judgment of Assyria.

The people see His judgment, and this causes them to have a proper fear of the Lord. It is not just any kind of fear. It is not fear where they are terrified. Instead, they rightly fear the Lord because He has become their treasure. Listen to v. 6b again, it is a beautiful sentence.

The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure.

Proverbs teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and now we learn that the fear of the Lord is our treasure.

Anyone who talks about the fear of God as a negative thing does not understand what it means to rightly fear the Lord. Proper fear of the Lord is part of a good confession of faith. So, our next step toward returning to the Lord is to confess our faith in Jesus.

III. Confess your sin to the King (vv. 7-9)

Next, as we make our way back to God, we learn that along with a good confession of faith goes a right confession of sin. Look in vv. 7-9:

⁷ *Listen! Their warriors cry loudly in the streets;
the messengers of peace weep bitterly.*
⁸ *The highways are deserted; travel has ceased.
An agreement has been broken, cities despised,
and human life disregarded.*
⁹ *The land mourns and withers;
Lebanon is ashamed and wilted.
Sharon is like a desert;
Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.*

Verses 7-9 describe the desolation and despair that has been wrought as Judah understands how they have sinned. Their attempts to save themselves have failed. They had not been trusting God, and now they are a broken people.

However, it was not just the people that were in mourning; the whole land was affected by their sin. Remember Assyria had been plowing their way through the land of Judah. The land that was pleasant has now been ravaged by their attempts to do an end-run around God. The people suffered for their disobedience, and the land suffered for their disobedience.

It is good to be broken over our sin, but we need to remember that our sin is never isolated to our own lives. Sin leaks over every part of our lives. Often our family and friends will suffer for our sin. It affects them. It might be directly or indirectly.

Think about it this way. Let's think of a sin that we may think is only isolated to our minds. Perhaps the *sin of lust* or *jealousy*. They seem to only be contained in the mind, that is, unless they are acted upon.

For example, you may not try to fulfill your lust or get angry when you are jealous, but it is still in your mind. Bottom line: Sins that seem to only exist internally or in our minds actually changes us externally in our

behavior. Sins of the mind will cause us to treat others differently. It might be lust or jealousy, but it could be a thousand different other sins that are hidden in our hearts and minds.

So, back to the sin of lust. If you are struggling with lust and you do not act on it, you might believe you are okay because you only think about it. The fact is, lust, as a sin in the mind, will cause you to treat people differently. If you are married, you will treat your spouse differently. The person you lust after might become objectified in your heart and how you treat them.

If it is jealousy, then you will begin to be suspicious and treat your loved one differently. You might begin to mistrust others and even your own spouse or friends.

Bottom line: Relationships will become like Bashan and Carmel and will suffer for your sin that you think only exists in the heart and mind. We think these sins are hidden, but they really are not hidden at all. They leak onto everything in our lives, and most certainly, they leak onto our relationships with others. Worst of all, unconfessed and repented of sin breaks fellowship with Jesus because it has leaked even into that relationship.

So, what must we do? We must be broken over our sin. We must be devastated because, ultimately, Jesus is the One who suffered fully and finally for our sin. *The Rose of Sharon* was crucified for every sin of commission and omission. He is the *Ultimate Sufferer* of our sin, and it is His heart that we break when we sin. Yet, He rejoices when we admit our sin and then turn from our sin and to Him for forgiveness and grace to change.

Now, let's consider the two promises that are given to us as we return to God.

IV. We are purified by the holy blood of the King (vv. 10-16)

The transformation we need is found in vv. 10-16.

¹⁰ *"Now I will rise up," says the Lord.*

"Now, I will lift myself up. Now I will be exalted.

¹¹ *You will conceive chaff; you will give birth to stubble.
Your breath is fire that will consume you.*

¹² *The peoples will be burned to ashes,
like thorns cut down and burned in a fire.*

¹³ *You who are far off, hear what I have done;
you who are near, know my strength."*

¹⁴ *The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling seizes the ungodly:
"Who among us can dwell with a consuming fire?
Who among us can dwell with ever-burning flames?"*

¹⁵ *The one who lives righteously and speaks rightly,
who refuses profit from extortion,
whose hand never takes a bribe,
who stops his ears from listening to murderous plots
and shuts his eyes against evil schemes—*

¹⁶ *he will dwell on the heights;
his refuge will be the rocky fortresses,
his food provided, his water assured.*

When we make our confession of sin and place our faith in Jesus—God goes work. He says,

"Now I will rise up.

Now I will lift myself up.

Now I will be exalted."

In one single act, God did two things. One, He destroyed Assyria. Verses 11-12 tell us that Assyria will be burned up like the chaff of wheat that burn like gas does when it meets a flame. The second thing He did was to purify by destroying Assyria. The people would see their deliverance in the destruction of the wicked, and this would change them. It would purify them.

When Judah saw the destruction of Assyria, they trembled in fear. Then they asked themselves in v. 14:

"Who among us can dwell with a consuming fire?

Who among us can dwell with ever-burning flames?"

They knew they were sinners, so they wanted to know how the sinners could stand in the presence of a Holy God who is a consuming fire.

Great question! The answer is no one can unless God has purified Him with His holy fire. God's holy fire consumes the chaff of sin and leaves the pure gold of our faith. This is the person who has been made righteous by God through their faith in Him.

The faith of Isaiah's day was in God, but it was only a shadow of what we now know. What they knew by faith, we know by name—Jesus Christ. The Holy One went to the cross to bear our sin and purchase ultimate righteousness.

On the cross, we see the great reversal or what we also call the great exchange. On the cross, our sin was transferred to Jesus, and His righteousness was transferred or, as Romans says, *"It was imputed to us so that we will be reckoned or accounted as righteous."*

We were purified by the blood of King Jesus and therefore made righteous before God. That is how sinners can stand in the presence of the King. This is the first promise. Now, let's see the second promise. V. We are renewed by the beauty of the King (vv. 17-24)

With purification comes renewal and deeper and deeper transformation into the image of our King. But how does this transformation occur? It is by beholding the King in His beauty, as v. 17 so wonderfully states.

Your eyes will see the King in his beauty.

The Apostle Paul says it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord
and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from
the Lord who is the Spirit.*

It is by beholding the beauty, splendor, and glory of Jesus that we are transformed into His image. We behold that glory by His Spirit as we spend time in poems like this one in Isaiah 33. We are transformed as we press our lives into the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we do that, we see *the King in His beauty*, and it changes us from one degree of glory to another.

Verses 20-21 talk about times of flourishing for the Israelites when the King saves them. Then v. 21 says:

*For the majestic one, our Lord, will be there,
a place of rivers and broad streams
where ships that are rowed will not go,
and majestic vessels will not pass.*

This is a poetic way of saying there will be no threat of the enemy slipping in and attacking by a large vessel or even by a small craft because the Lord is there, and He is our Protector.

We need to understand that this text that is already and not yet. It was fulfilled in Isaiah's day when Yahweh delivered His people from Assyria, but it is not fully realized because it also looks forward to the time when we will be with God in Heaven where there will be no threat from the enemy.

Isaiah 33 concludes with this poetic imagery of a battered ship. This ship was in such bad shape it could not fight. However, it did not need to go to war because God has won the battle.

²³ *Your ropes are slack;
they cannot hold the base of the mast
or spread out the flag.
[But the] . . . abundant spoil will be divided,
the lame will plunder it,
²⁴ and none there will say, "I am sick."
The people who dwell there
will be forgiven their iniquity.*

These two verses remind us of the victory of the community of faith—the church. The church is like a beaten and battered ship that is struggling on the sea and, in some ways, is even drifting. The mast is not raised, and the ropes are hanging loose, but it does not matter because Jesus will make sure this floating disaster with all of its warts, bumps, gaffs, and sin wins the victory. He is going to restore her and make her holy.

The church, the Bride of Christ, wins because Jesus has won the victory. We get to enjoy His spoils of victory. Ultimately, He heals us, and “*None will say, ‘I am sick.’*” We are healed because He has forgiven us and taken our sins away.

Look in v. 24:

*The people who dwell there
will be forgiven their iniquity.*

This is the language of Leviticus 16 where the sins of the community of faith are transferred to the head of the scapegoat. The scapegoat bears our sin away as far as the east is from the west.

Jesus is the Goat who bears our sins away. Two thousand years ago, on the cross, outside of Jerusalem, Jesus, our Goat, broke the power of sin over us and paid the penalty of our sin. He removed the wrath of God that was upon us for our sin by taking the wrath of God for us.

God’s word says that if we trust Him, He bears our sin away, and it is never brought up again. Our guilt is gone. Romans 8:1 says, “*There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”

The question is: Are you in Christ? Have you placed your faith in Him? The brothers and sisters, in Christ, have you drifted from Jesus? Do you need to return to Him today and be renewed by beholding the beauty of Jesus on the cross bearing your sin and rising from the dead, winning the victory over death for you? For in Christ is the death of death, and all who look to Him are saved and renewed.