

- 18 "Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.**
- 19 See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the desert
and streams in the wasteland.**
- 20 The wild animals honor me,
the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the desert
and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,**
- 21 the people I formed for myself
that they may proclaim my praise.**
- 22 "Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob,
you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel.**
- 23 You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings,
nor honored me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with grain offerings
nor wearied you with demands for incense.**
- 24 You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me,
or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices.
But you have burdened me with your sins
and wearied me with your offenses.**
- 25 "I, even I, am he who blots out
your transgressions, for my own sake,
and remembers your sins no more.**

Dear fellow redeemed,

For my introduction, this opening statement is directed to those young children here, around the age of my own children. A long, long time ago, there was an office appliance and device that your parents would most likely be familiar with from their years of high school through college. It was a device known as a typewriter. It required patient and accurate use. Today, I have no doubt that many of these machines are collecting dust or filling up landfills. On rare occasion, these machines might be kept around to fill out a pre-printed form. These machines gave every writer the opportunity to put on paper a clear and readable document, but it required special attention and maintenance when mistakes were made. You needed to have on hand, whiteout, correction tape, or a typewriter with a correction ribbon. All of this work took more time than we are accustomed to, with our word processors and personal computers.

You see, back then, there was not a delete key to be found or to use. Today, we not only can see our mistakes before the document is printed, our computers can even find our mistakes for us with their spell checkers and grammar checkers. All we need to do is pass the cursor over our mistakes and then simply push that single "delete" button. As a result, the error is gone and we can easily make the needed correction. In a sense, we get a clean slate and make it all right.

God today is reminding us that as quickly and easily as we can delete our spelling errors or grammar mistakes, he does delete our sins, our errors, and our mistakes. This is a remarkable truth when we realize how grievous, how obvious and visible they are to us and to God. This whole truth unfolds before us today, as he speaks to his Old Testament people at the time of the Prophet Isaiah, about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Therefore, we will come to realize that -

Only God Can and Does Delete our Errors!

1. Our sins are a real burden to God!
2. Yet God remembers our sins no more!

1.

The opening words of our text make a brief and passing reference to the spectacular and miraculous events that have marked the history of Israel. But regarding these things, Isaiah says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past" (vs. 18). Such great events were etched into the minds of God's Old Testament people. But such events would soon be overshadowed and made small in comparison to an even greater miracle and blessing, namely the deleting and the blotting out of their sins.

Let's take a moment to recount those unparalleled events of history that now pale in comparison to God's greater gift of forgiveness. Prior to our text Isaiah mentions two key historical truths. First, he reminds his hearers of that awesome deliverance and rescue from slavery in Egypt. In the words of Isaiah, "He (the LORD) made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick" (vs. 16-17). Secondly, another astounding event would also be realized sometime after the ministry of Isaiah. Here he assures them that while their sins would reap their own destruction and demise at the hands of the Babylonian empire, God would again rescue them. In fact, God would turn the powerful and renowned empire of the Babylonians into a weak and subservient nation at the hands of the Persians. Isaiah foretells this truth in the verses prior to our text. Here he tells us that the very ships that once brought wealth and riches to Babylon along the Euphrates River, would one day be used to carry away the citizens of Babylon as refugees and fugitives upon their defeat by the Persians (referenced in verse 14). God's people were then given the assurance that this would occur after their seventy years of captivity, so that they could then return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Ultimately, God granted them this miracle to set the stage for the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem.

To ponder such spectacular and history-altering events is not and would not be the height of God's supernatural intervention in the lives of his people. God would address a feat and work that no person could ever come close to accomplishing. To cause the hearers and readers of Isaiah to appreciate and realize this greater miracle, we need to see the serious nature and the horrible reality of our sin. For our sin is a real burden to God! In our day and age, sin is so often minimized and downplayed. Many in our world adopt the notion of situation ethics. In other words, they say "What might be a sin for you is not a sin for me. It all depends on one's feelings and how our actions can benefit other people. God would want us to be happy, so then it must be OK." But God alone gets to provide the definition and the rules that make clear for all people what sin is and what its consequences are. In short, every sin involves an emphasis on serving self and failing to give God that rightful place within our hearts and minds. Beginning with Adam and Eve, their sin involved putting first their desire to serve self over the expectation of serving God and his holy will.

Daily, God holds before our eyes a simple but revealing question. Jesus, God's son, asks us, "Do you love me?" As he once asked the Apostle Peter, "Do you truly love me?" Our answer to this question says something. Our response to that question consists in the way we live our lives and conduct ourselves. Too often this reveals to our God and to ourselves that we do not regularly love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all strength and with all our mind. (Such a test was given to Abraham when he was told to show that he had a greater love for the Lord than for his promised son, Isaac, born to him in his old age.)

Such an exposure of our sin and sinful condition is a necessary teaching. We call it the preaching of the law. It leads us to the fuller message of sin and grace. This teaching is at times criticized as being not what we want to hear. Some will say, "When I come to church I want to hear something new and exciting, something other than sin and grace." But dear friends, there is nothing more

relevant, more current and more meaningful than this law/gospel message found in our text today.

Consider the ramifications of our sinful actions and behavior. Every time we sin, we are saying that we no longer love God. Jesus told his disciples, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). To illustrate how sin bears consequences, consider the sport of curling. As you know, we have local residents competing on both US curling teams in the winter Olympics. So if you are like me you may be giving some attention to this competition. Interestingly, in curling a great part of the strategy and game plan is to know that each rock pushed down the ice will and can alter the placement of many other rocks. The rocks will push and bounce off other rocks for the purpose of getting a good placement near the center circle. There is a reaction that is expected and planned for. In a similar fashion, every time you and I sin there is a reaction, there is a consequence, there is a reverberation resulting from what we think, say and do. Ultimately, even when we think that our sin only affects one other individual or maybe just hurts ourselves, it really affects God and hurts him. Isaiah writes later on in chapter 59, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (vs. 2).

Consider also, the personal affront and insult God receives when we turn our back on his holy will. Imagine a wealthy father choosing to let his son or daughter learn to appreciate what they have, by making them earn or borrow in order to achieve their personal goals. Take for example a college degree. That son or daughter works, saves and borrows to achieve such a degree. Then upon graduation, after receiving their diploma, that wealthy father hands that child a check for the full amount that would cover tens of thousands of dollars in student loans. (Certainly, in Christ, God our Father has covered our enormous debt of sin.) But now imagine that child taking such a gift and then spitting in their father’s face or kicking him in the teeth. Such a response could only be characterized as appalling, and violent, and rude. In truth every time we sin against our holy God that is precisely what we are doing to our perfect and loving Father in heaven. We do this very thing every time we place our own personal agenda above God’s rule, or when we strive to live life according to our terms rather than God’s terms.

Sin bears serious and real consequences. Because of the ramifications and reaction of each and every sin, God needed to set in motion his spectacular plan and way of fixing what we broke. As our text reminds us, our sin is a real burden to God. One commentator makes a strong point of saying that this means “You have forced God into labor with your sins” (Brown, The People’s Bible, page 89). God did the work you and I have not come close to starting, much less finishing. In a few short days the Lenten season will begin with Ash Wednesday on March 1. During that time of the church year we will walk with our Savior to his passion and death. Every step of the way he will undergo the labor and work of our salvation, by living the holy sinless life, resisting every temptation to sin along the way, he will suffer the agony, the pain and the shame of death by crucifixion. All this will be in your place and my place, because sin cannot just be ignored but must be accounted for and paid for. Truly, such a loving and cleansing act is the greatest of all God’s miracles.

2.

Leave here today, knowing and valuing this great and profound truth: “God blots out your transgressions . . . and remembers your sins no more.” Our text further adds the detail that God also says, “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake” (vs. 25). That means our loving God is the cause and the reason for your forgiveness. He is the reason for you needing to be forgiven. For God does not let dirty people come into his clean house. God’s house is our heavenly home. And every sin is filthy and stinks to him. Our holy God cannot stand the sight and smell of sin and those dirtied with sin. So our God is the cause for us now being made holy and clean in his sight. He gets all the credit. Such a picture was familiar to God’s Old Testament people. Whenever they brought sacrifices before the Lord, they were required to wash

such offerings. If anyone was pronounced or labeled as being “unclean” due to a sickness or because they touched a dead body, they were required to have a ceremonial washing before they reentered the assembly. Even our children are regularly told during this cold and flu season, “Wash your hands regularly, especially before you come to the dinner table.” The germs not visible to the naked eye must also be washed away. So also we must be made thoroughly clean before we can enter into God’s house. Jesus’ blood is all-sufficient. It is the blessed detergent that makes us clean. The holy writer to the Hebrews reminds us, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). This is the most significant cleansing, which is ours through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This truth is relevant even now, before we enter into God’s house. As Isaiah earlier on quoted God’s word to his people, calling them “the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise”, God has also made us for this special purpose. We have the high privilege of worshipping him beyond the confines and limitations of these walls. Indeed, we will want to do this because he first loved us.

During the course of this past week, each one of us has piled up and accumulated an assortment of sins. Some of which may even be weighing on our hearts at this moment. Such guilt brings with it stress and anxiety, and at times unwanted behavior. We may feel ...

- The guilt of misused time, time that is now wasted and can not be retrieved,
- The guilt of wasting the money God has entrusted to us,
- The guilt of speaking inappropriate words, words that we cannot take back and erase,
- The guilt of failing to use our talents for the furtherance of Christ’s Kingdom.

You and I could most likely spend all day recounting such sins committed against our loving Lord. But our all-knowing God is also our all-forgetting God. And our all-forgetting God is also our all-forgiving God. God help us to respond in joy and thanksgiving, as well as thanks living, to these blessed words of assurance in Christ, “He remembers yours sins no more.”

AMEN.