

**Voom! Restored and Made New**

June 29, 2025

**Isaiah 1:15-20**

*<sup>15</sup> When you extend your hands, I'll hide my eyes from you. Even when you pray for a long time, I won't listen. Your hands are stained with blood. <sup>16</sup> Wash! Be clean! Remove your ugly deeds from my sight. Put an end to such evil; <sup>17</sup> learn to do good. Seek justice: help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow. <sup>18</sup> Come now, and let's settle this, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow. If they are red as crimson, they will become like wool. <sup>19</sup> If you agree and obey, you will eat the best food of the land. <sup>20</sup> But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. The Lord has said this.*

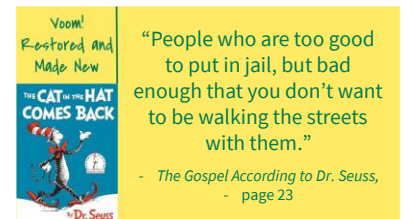


The prophet Isaiah wrote to a people who had turned away from God. It began at the top and worked its way down. Their leaders failed on three accounts. First, casting their lot with the local gods and idols, Israel had forsaken their first, true love. Second, as the great empire of the day closed in on them, they sought alliances with earthly powers instead of turning to the all-powerful God of heaven and earth. Third, and most importantly, the leaders' lust for power and wealth led them to abuse and take advantage of the poorest amongst them, those who hold a special place in the heart of God. Israel's relationship with God was a total mess, a complete disaster. Yet it was not beyond repair. With God, nothing is ever impossible to redeem and restore. As we prepare to hear the good news once again, let us pray...

Many of us are familiar with *The Cat in the Hat*. In the first book, the Cat visits two bored children, Sally and her brother, on a rainy day. Despite the repeated objections of the children's pet fish, the Cat introduces these children to his chaotic games and tricks.

Along with Thing One and Thing Two, the cat makes a complete mess of the house. The children (and the fish) are greatly alarmed. Using a special machine, the house is cleaned up by the cat, just before mother arrives back home, much to the relief of Sally and her brother.

In the second book, *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, the main characters are still the boy and the girl and the cat. The basic theme is the same: the cat creates messes. At first impression, the cat is likable enough. The cat seems innocent enough and likes to have a good time. The cat is not 'evil' but does have a penchant for getting himself and others in trouble. Perhaps you know a person or two like the cat in the hat – people who press on with their plan without regard to how their actions affect others. They are people we don't like but can't quite hate, because in the end they usually clean up their messes. But because of the messes they create, they are just hard to be around. James Kemp sums up these types of people beautifully on page 23, where he writes, "People who are too good to put in jail, but bad enough that you don't want to be walking the streets with them." Think about that quote for a minute... Do you have anyone like this in your life?



Most of us can also relate to the messy situations created by the mischievous cat. The cat invites himself into the house and hops in the bathtub uninvited. When told to get out of the tub, a horrible pink ring is discovered. But instead of simply leaving as asked, the cat takes action. The pink mess goes from the tub to mom's new white dress and on and on, each mess worse than the previous mess, until all the snow in the yard is covered in the horrible pink mess.

As I reflected on this idea, my mind went to the reality that sin can have this effect in our lives too. A small, seemingly insignificant sin, left unchecked, grows and grows, until like the pink in the snow, it stains everything. One small, almost innocent action leads to a slightly less innocent but larger action, which then leads to a slightly larger, slightly more sinful action. At some point, we awaken to our sin and we cannot believe where we find ourselves. Usually, at that point, though, we can look back at the trail of destruction left in our wake and we then realize that we were that person – the one creating messes in our lives and in other people’s lives, much like the cat in the hat.

Sometimes we are on the other side of the situation. Sometimes we are the ones affected by the messes created by other people. The simple fact is this: our world is a messy place. This truth is revealed throughout the story of scripture. Since almost the beginning of time, humanity has made a mess of the good and beautiful world that God created. All of the creation, in the beginning, was very good. But as humanity began to live in this good world, trash began to show up: a half-eaten piece of fruit, some torn fig leaves, a slain brother. And that’s just in the first few chapters of Genesis.

As we flash forward to our time, we have all kinds of messes in our world. Last week, as we named our fears, many of these messes were named. Of this reality, on page 24, James Kemp writes, “Like children on Christmas morning, human beings have, to a large degree, grabbed the gifts of creation and left piles and piles of trash behind.” Sadly, the messes that we have created are not just physical messes. Collectively, we have created messes that are much more painful. In many cases, those in power have placed pride, greed, and prejudices ahead of people.



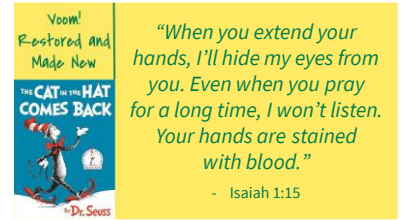
We have to look no further than Pine Ridge or Rosebud or many other reservations to find evidence of the negative impacts of these evils. Closer to home, there are many people, often single parents, living paycheck to paycheck, struggling just to scrape by. And in many of our cities, the poverty and homelessness that exist is ignored by those with the power and resources to end these injustices and hardships. Whether our native brothers and sisters on our reservations, whether the poor or homeless on our streets, whether the immigrants and refugees in our cities – too often care and concern for such as these are discarded like fast-food wrappers. What a sharp contrast this is to the call of Jesus, the one who told us that when we trample or disregard or ignore one of the least of these, we ignore Jesus himself.



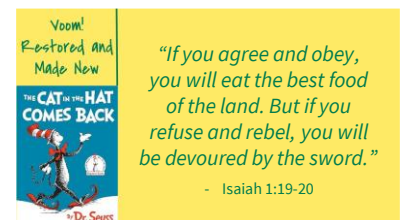
Sadly, throughout history, humanity has trashed God’s creation and God’s people. Sadder still, much of this “trashing” can be directed towards self. Via many different avenues of destructive behaviors and harmful choices, people of all ages can get to a place where they question if they can even be cleaned up anymore. In this place, many resign from truly living, and they merely exist. They give up on their hopes and dreams. For many, the messes created or inherited overwhelm all hope of ever being cleaned up. This is a sad, hopeless place to be.

Turning to Isaiah 1, this was the situation in Judah, the southern kingdom. Isaiah spoke to a people surrounded by destruction in a world crumbling apart from within and without. The mess that they faced was partly their own doing, partly due to the threat being brought on by the mighty Assyrians. The leaders of Judah and then the people had turned away from God, looking instead to idols and to foreign powers to save them. They still pretended to worship God, but they were just going through the motions. The rich were exploiting and oppressing the poor.

This is why God says, *“When you extend your hands, I’ll hide my eyes from you. Even when you pray for a long time, I won’t listen. Your hands are stained with blood.”* The blood isn’t from battling the Assyrians. The stains are from the blood of the poor, the marginalized, the immigrant among them. Until these evils are made right, God will not respond or listen to their prayers. God does offer a solution. God implores God’s people to first wash and be made clean, to put an end to such evils. We call this step ‘confession.’ God next invites the people to act in repentance, to change their ways, to do good. Doing good involves this: *“Seek justice: help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.”* In all these things, God says, stand for the least of these. About 700 years later, Jesus would tell his disciples that when they do these things for such as these, they do them for him.



The good news that Isaiah told Judah was that their situation doesn’t have to be the mess that it is. The prophet spoke words of hope that said, no matter how big the mess, no matter how deep the stains, no matter how severe their sins appeared, God could take it away and they could start anew. In verse 18, courtroom style, God invites the people to change their sinful ways so that they could realign their hearts with God’s heart. Here, through Isaiah, God says, *“Come now, and let’s settle this.”* It is time to make a choice. And then God offers the ‘why,’ why they should choose the deal: *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow. If they are red as crimson, they will become like wool.”* Forgiveness, redemption, and restoration hanging out there like a carrot on a stick, God then lays out the conditions: *“If you agree and obey, you will eat the best food of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.”*



To give these words some context and depth, let us return to the mess that Judah was. The Assyrians have ravaged the land – there are no grapes or olives left on the vine, there are no stalks of grain to be found anywhere. All of the other cities of Judah have been laid waste – they are burning piles of debris. Any and all who have escaped the flood of the Assyrian army have fled to Jerusalem, where they wait for the siege of Jerusalem to begin. Once that happens, food and water will begin to dwindle and starvation and thirst will increasingly settle in. It is in that context that Isaiah’s audience hears these words: *“agree and obey... eat the best food of the land.”* Looking out beyond the walls, seeing the destruction of Judah, recently watching Israel defeated and hauled into exile, Judah also hear these words: *“refuse and rebel... be devoured by the sword.”* Put within all of this context, it would seem like an easy choice to make, wouldn’t it?



Returning to our Dr. Seuss story, *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, Sally and her brother have a yard full of pink snow. The mess could not get any worse. But just like the story of our faith, this children’s story has a happy ending too. The smallest cat of the whole bunch – cat Z – brings the solution to the problem. Cat Z has the power to clean the mess up once and for all. Cat Z has what Dr. Seuss calls “Voom.” Though small, this Voom has the power to clean up the whole house, to put things in order, to restore everything to the way it is meant to be. With its powerful Voom, Cat Z wipes away all the pink stains. The snow is white, the walks are cleared of snow, the tiny cats are back inside the hat, and the Cat in the Hat is on his way.

For this broken world, the Voom with the power to restore all things, to make all things new again – this Voom is Jesus Christ our Lord.

He is the Savior, the one who came into the world that we trashed in order to collect all the garbage, to collect all of the sin that clutters our world and makes messes of our lives. Carrying this garbage, Jesus climbed a hill to a place that was a dumping ground for humans who were considered to have no worth. On a cross, on a hill called Calvary, Jesus disposed of all the trash, of all the sins of the world. Even though human beings tried to dispose of Jesus, God raised him up from the dead and gave him power over sin and death.

This is the good news for you and for me and for the entire world: no matter where our messes came from and no matter how unconquerable they seem to be, we worship a God for whom no mess is too messy. If we just choose to trust and obey, to have faith and to commit to walking in God's ways, then life can begin anew at any time. God will take all of our brokenness and make it whole. Paul writes of this fresh start in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17, where he writes, *"So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!"*



In towns and cities across the nation, people put out their trash on the curb, waiting for it to be hauled away. Christ invites us to do this very thing with the garbage that has found its way into our lives. Jesus promises to remove our old ways, our sinful ways of the world, and to make us into new people, people made in his image. Early on every Thursday morning I roll the garbage can out to the edge of the street so that the garbage can be hauled away. Hear the good news today: we do not have to wait for Thursday mornings, or for any other morning. Jesus Christ is ever ready to hear our confession, to accept our repentance, hauling away our sin, making us new again. Thanks be to God. Alleluia and amen.

**GPS - Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. How has God worked in the messes in your life – those you created or that others created? And how did God work in and through these for your benefit?
- 2) *Pray*. Who do you know whose life seems to be a “mess?” What practical steps can you take to help them to begin the restoration and redemption process? Begin with prayer.
- 3) *Study*. Read 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:16-21. Do you need this reconciliation? Accept it as offered. Do you know another who needs it? Share these words with them.