

## The Gospel According To Isaiah (Isaiah April 15, 2022)



For many weeks now, we have been sickened by images of war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine. Civilians attacked, women raped, children killed, hospitals demolished.

We have all felt outrage – but also impotence. What can be done about such atrocities?

And the question inevitably rises – why doesn't God do something – where is God when it matters?

If God is good – surely – He too is sickened by what is happening.

If God is all-powerful – surely – He must act – perhaps regime change in Russia might be a good start.

These questions are nothing new. They have been asked for thousands and thousands of years.

### **Where is God when it matters?**

And then we realise – every single year – the world stops on one Friday in March or April – to remember – God **is** outraged and He **has** acted.

Even if you have not asked the question – where is God? – in relation to the invasion of Ukraine – you will have asked this question at some point.

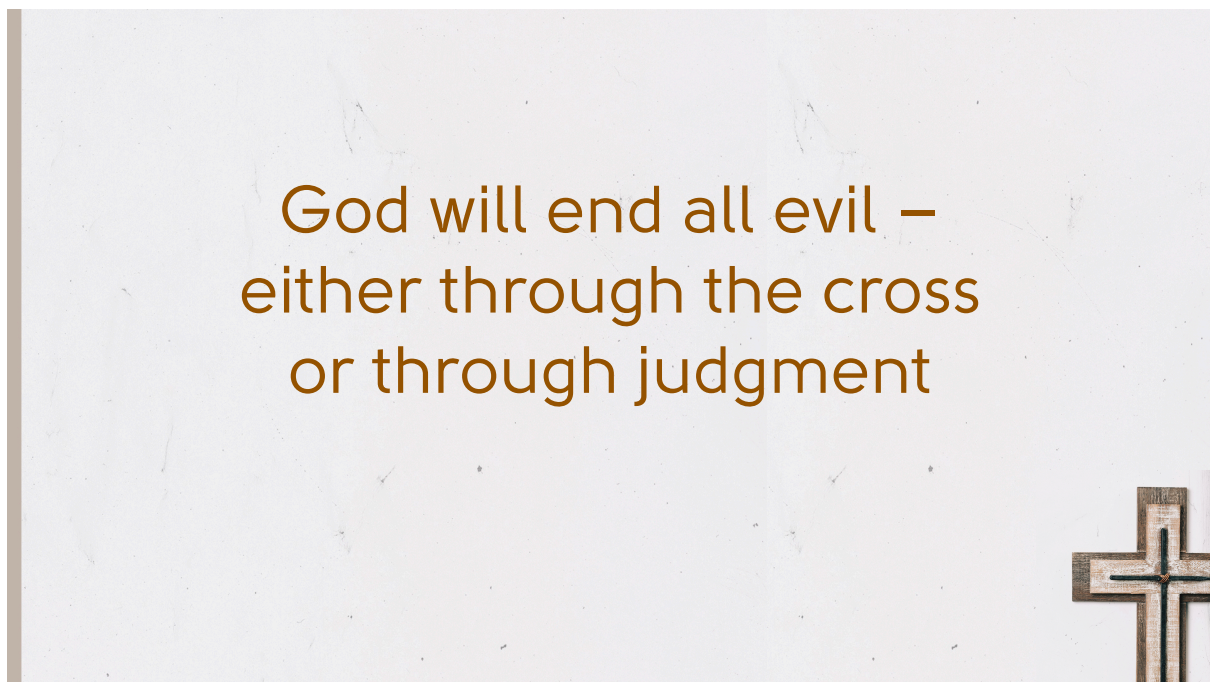
Where is God? – when your child gets cancer, when your wife leaves you, when an earthquake kills tens of thousands, when some terrible injustice is perpetrated?

Bad stuff happens every single day in this world – wars, famines, earthquakes, pandemics, cancer, crime.

Where is God when the bad stuff is happening?

In many ways this is *exactly* the question the book of Isaiah answers.

And here is the answer Isaiah gives.



**God will end all evil – either through the cross or through judgment.**

**God will end all evil – either through the cross or through judgment.**

Isaiah wrote at a time when some really bad stuff was happening to the people of Israel.

The book opens with:

## The Gospel According To Isaiah

The felt outrage – really bad things are happening



### **The felt outrage – really bad things are happening**

Bad stuff was happening – and God knew it was happening. Isaiah 1:7–9:

The felt outrage – really bad things are happening

Isaiah 1:7–9:

Your land is desolate, your cities burned down; foreigners devour your fields right in front of you — a desolation, like a place demolished by foreigners. Daughter Zion is abandoned like a shelter in a vineyard, like a shack in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. If the Lord of Armies had not left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would resemble Gomorrah.



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At this time, the dominant superpower in the world was Assyria.



Assyria made Putin look like a boy scout.

They were brutal. They demanded that Israel surrender, pay enormous sums in tribute and acknowledge the majesty of Assyria's gods.

They had a well-tested strategy. They would march into a territory and choose one city to make an example of.

They would storm the city and rape every woman and girl – torture the men and boys – and ultimately kill every living thing in the city. They would then hang the skinned corpses of the people on the city wall.

No Geneva convention – this was an absolute war crime.

Then they would send messengers to every other city in the territory.

Any city that did not lay down their weapons, open their gates and agree to every demand – they would suffer the same fate.

They boasted of their cruelty. Listen to the words of the Assyrian King Ashur-Nasirpal II:

In the midst of the mighty mountains I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. ... I carried off their spoil and their possessions. The heads of their warriors I cut off, ... their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire. ... I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins.

In 722BC Assyria – this incredibly vicious nation – marched in and ended the northern kingdom of Israel – *forever*.

Assyria then faded from the world scene.

But the troubles of the people of Israel were not over. By the end of the book of Isaiah – a new enemy had risen – now it was Babylon. And now the threat was against the only part of the nation left – the southern kingdom of Judah.

Babylon had its own scorched earth policy. They would kill most and cart the rest into captivity. They left nothing – every city was destroyed – barely a stone was left standing.

So, throughout this book, the people of God had a burning question. God – we are Your people and bad – really bad – things are happening to us – so why aren't You doing something?

God responds and says – well you could have stopped this yourself.



## The Gospel According To Isaiah

The felt outrage – really bad things are happening

The impossible solution – just stop doing bad things



### **The impossible solution – just stop doing bad things**

Look at Isaiah 1:16–17:

The impossible solution – just stop doing bad things

Isaiah 1:16–17:

Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil. Learn to do what is good. Pursue justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause.



Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil. Learn to do what is good. Pursue justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause.

You want the slaughter to stop – you want peace and joy in the land – no problem – all you have to do is just stop sinning.

Sin is the root issue for everything bad.

So, remove the evil and cleanse yourselves.

The Bible tells us that God created this perfect world for us.

No war, no atrocities, no death.

Shalom – peace – with each other and with God.

In Eden, the world was perfect – no floods, earthquakes, pandemics.

But we messed it up.

Adam wanted to be like God – rebelled against God – and everything bad came into the world. Thorns, thistles, cyclones, anger, death.

Adam started it – but since then – every one of us has walked in his footsteps.

So, if the reason there are wars and murder is sin – then the solution is obvious – just stop sinning!

If everyone stops sinning – removes all evil – did what is right – no war – no carnage.

But, the problem is humanly speaking – this is an impossible solution.

The Bible says we run to evil like water down a hill.

We can no more stop doing evil than a leopard can change its spots.

God is perfectly holy – so His standard is perfection – no sin – forever.

If we try and meet that standard – we fail – miserably – and fairly quickly.

From time to time most of us have said – that's it – no more sinning for me.

You might be travelling well for a while – then someone cuts you off in traffic, or you notice a particularly good-looking woman, or the kids start fighting – and your quest to live without sin is gone.

No one can do it. All have fallen short. Our lives are filled with smaller sins and punctuated by bigger sins.

Israel simply could not stop doing evil and neither can we.

So, the question becomes – if we can't end evil – who can?

Well now Isaiah gets specific. He tells us about:

## The Gospel According To Isaiah

The felt outrage – really bad things are happening  
The impossible solution – just stop doing bad things  
The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends



### **The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends.**

God lays out His plan very clearly.

A day will come when God will end all evil. There is an easy way and a hard way – and everyone will have their evil ended one way or the other.

First, God talks about the easy way. Verse 18:

The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends

Isaiah 1:

18 "Come, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool."



"Come, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool."



OK – since you can't do it – I will do it. Since you can't wash yourself clean – I will settle things by washing you Myself.

I will wash you and make you white as snow.

Isaiah 1:25–26:

The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends

Isaiah 1:

18 "Come, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool."

25–26 I will ... burn away your dross completely; I will remove all your impurities. ... Afterward you will be called the Righteous City, a Faithful Town.



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How? Verse 27:

## The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends

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25–26 I will ... burn away your dross completely; I will remove all your impurities. ... Afterward you will be called the Righteous City, a Faithful Town.

27 Zion will be redeemed by justice, those who repent, by righteousness.



Zion will be redeemed by justice, those who repent, by righteousness.

God’s people won’t become holy by their own efforts – they will become holy through justice – which means under the terms of the Law – and what makes them redeemed and righteous is faith – repentance.

God’s people will trust Him – turn from their sin – and He will do what they cannot – He will wash them clean.

And at that time – life will be good – verse 19 says:

If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land.

That is one way God will remove evil – by washing us clean – removing our impurities.

But notice there is another way.

Verse 20:

## The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends

Isaiah 1:

20 But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.

28 At the same time both rebels and sinners will be broken, and those who abandon the Lord will perish.



**But** if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.

Verse 28:

At the same time both rebels and sinners will be broken, and those who abandon the LORD will perish.

There are those who will say – I am captain of my own life and my own destiny.

Thanks but no thanks. I'm not onboard with plan A. I take responsibility for my own sin.

Well, if you do not allow God to remove the sin from you – then He will remove you along with the sin in you.

You and your sin will never again taint the earth.

As the book of Isaiah unfolds – especially in the last chapters of this book – we find that this day is coming when all evil will be washed away and a new heavens and new earth without sin will be recreated from this world.

And in terms of people, on that day all humanity will be divided into one of two groups.

Those who have accepted God's offer to wash us clean will enter in.

This group is called by many names – Zion – the holy people of God.

But those who have rejected His offer – will be removed and face eternal destruction.

But one way or another all sin – all evil is going.



And then everything we want – peace, joy, no war will cover the earth. Isaiah 2:2–4:

## The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends

Isaiah 2:2–4:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's house will be established ... He will settle disputes among the nations and provide arbitration for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not take up the sword against nation, and they will never again train for war.



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Isaiah is clear – God is going to remove every last trace of sin in the creation – it is going to happen.

Whether you like God's way – whether you believe in a God or not – whether you think this is unfair or not – get ready – it is coming.

There is no way to sugar-coat the bad way. The bad way is judgment and hell.

Those who refuse the good way will be judged.

They have rebelled against the King. They have failed to meet the standard. Their sin remains – and they and their sin will be banished to hell.

But, the dominant theme in the rest of the book of Isaiah is about the other option.

## The Gospel According To Isaiah

The felt outrage – really bad things are happening  
The impossible solution – just stop doing bad things  
The coming watershed – one way or the other evil ends  
**The unthinkable option – God Himself will pay the price**



### **The unthinkable option – God Himself will pay the price.**

It sounds easy – I will wash you white as snow. I will burn your dross away.

It is actually something near impossible – even for God. It raises so many questions – it takes the rest of the book to answer them.

Maybe think about it this way.

Can God just forgive our sin?

If we say – we are sorry for messing up – can God just say – fine – you are forgiven?

King David committed terrible sin. His adultery with Bathsheba. His murder of her husband Uriah to cover it up.

In Psalm 51 David asks for forgiveness:

Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight.

In 2 Samuel 12:13 we read this:

David responded to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Then Nathan replied to David, “And the LORD has taken away your sin; you will not die.”

Is it really that easy?

David realises his sin – asks for forgiveness and God says – I have taken your sin away?

Is there no punishment – no accounting – no justice for what David did to Bathsheba and Uriah? Can God just say – it is washed clean?

The Bible is very clear – even God can't simply forgive sin.

Numbers 14:18:

The LORD ... will not leave the guilty unpunished.

Nahum 1:3:

The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will never leave the guilty unpunished.

Someone has to pay for every single sin.

The Bible speaks much about justice.

Let me talk about human justice.

If someone punches me in the nose – but then says – I'm really sorry – I shouldn't have done that – please forgive me.

I have a choice – I can say – nah – I'm more of an eye for an eye guy – so Rhoi is going to Brazilian Jujutsu you for me – then we will be even.

**Or** I can choose to say – OK I forgive you – and it is over.

Now, if I say – I forgive you – does that mean the sin done against me just vanishes – that it is never punished?

Imagine a godly mother in Ukraine whose child is killed by a Russian bomb who then looks to the heavens and says – as hard as it is – I forgive you President Putin.

Does that mean there is no justice, no punishment for that sin?

No it doesn't!

I wish I had time to unpack this properly – but the Bible says even if I forgive someone – it doesn't mean there are no consequences for their sin.

All sin has to be paid for one way or another.

Romans 12:19 is a very important verse:

Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, **Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay**, says the Lord.

Paul says – no sin ever goes unpunished. The buck for sin stops with God. God ultimately deals with every act of sin ever committed.



When I forgive someone it means I am choosing not to deal with their sin against me – but it doesn't mean that sin is not dealt with.

Ultimately all sin is sin against God and He will deal with every act of sin ever committed.

If that Ukrainian mother forgives Putin – she is allowing God to deal with his sin.

So, what does God do with that sin?

Can He just say – OK the buck stops with Me – I forgive that sin – there are no consequences?

Could God look at the violated Bathsheba and dead Uriah and just say – well David you appear very remorseful – I forgive you – it is done?

Is that just? Could you imagine the holy angels watching that and saying – Yeah – justice has been served?

No!

Isaiah tells us that there are two options for sin.

One is made very clear by the Law.

One option is that we pay for our own sin.

I can't tell you how bad an option that is.

Sin against a holy God requires an eternity in hell.

God's holiness and justice seem to say there is no other option.

But stunningly, Isaiah says – there is another option.

This is where things get really interesting.

How else could my sin be paid for?

That becomes the great question in the Old Testament – how can God forgive sin?

There are hints.

In Isaiah 6 – Isaiah has a vision of the absolute holiness of God.

He realizes God is so holy even the angels cover their faces and feet before Him.

Who is clean enough to stand before a God like that?

Isaiah says I'm not:

Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies.

OK – I am done and every person in Israel is done.

But then we read this Isaiah 6:6-7:

## The unthinkable option – God Himself will pay the price

Isaiah 6:6-7:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for.



Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is **atoned for**.

**Not** – your sin is **forgiven** – but your sin is **atoned for**.

Atonement is a promise that our sin will be paid for completely – so the relationship between God and us can be restored.

But how? How can sin be atoned for – paid completely?

What could possibly satisfy the justice of a perfectly holy God?

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As the book of Isaiah unfolds, we find that this promise of atonement is wrapped up in a mysterious figure who will come to pay the price and bring peace between God and man.

He appears through this book but let me remind you of a few well-known places.

Isaiah 9:5–6:

For every trampling boot of battle and the bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, **Prince of Peace**.

A child will come who will bring peace and end all war.

Then we have chapter after chapter that shows us – no man can end sin and war. Even a good king like Hezekiah can't.

Most of you know that Isaiah is divided into two parts.

The second part begins in chapter 40. Here is how it opens. Isaiah 40:1:

“Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God.

Help is coming.

In Isaiah 52:7 we read:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”



Here is the good news Zion – God is going to provide peace and salvation.

But how?

It comes in perhaps the most unexpected, shocking way imaginable.

In Isaiah 52:13 – God promises He will send a servant who will be successful in accomplishing atoning and bringing peace.

So, you are a Jew – in captivity in Babylon – and God sends you a message of hope regarding a servant who will come to bring peace and save you.

What type of peace-bringing servant are you expecting?

Now here is Israel's problem, Ukraine's problem – our problem.

We are looking for the wrong kind of peace.

To the Jews in captivity – Babylon seems to be the problem. They want a King with a huge army to swoop in and deliver them. That will bring peace.

The Ukrainians want Europe or the US to come in and wipe Putin from the face of the earth. That will bring peace.

What kind of peace do you and I want?

We aren't at war – so we want someone who will fix the economy, end the pandemic, show China who is boss, provide nice affordable housing, keep interest rates low, end racism and come up with a Socceros team that will not only make the World Cup – but win it (well that is what I want anyway).

We want a better choice of peace-bringer than Morrison or Albanese.

Here is the problem.

Even if all our wishes and desires came true – the peace would be very short-lived.

Assyria destroyed the Northern Kingdom – then God dealt with them. Yeah peace.

But Babylon appeared. So, God deals with Babylon – but guess what? – Greece rises – and puts Israel under its boot.

So, the Maccabees rise up and free Israel – then Rome appears – and the Israel is scattered – and then the holocaust.

**While sin remains there is always another enemy.**

**While sin remains there is always another enemy.**

World War I ends – yeah – it was the war to end all wars – peace in our time – until Hitler and Mussolini.

The good guys defeat the Nazis. Then comes the Cold War – but the Berlin Wall falls. Europe is united – there will be no more war in Europe.

Really?

We will always face issues – war, death, injustice, bigotry – because sin remains.

So, God’s plan is to end sin – every last trace of it.

And the one we ultimately have to deal with is not Babylon or Russia – it is God.

So, what kind of servant can possibly end sin?

A very unlikely one.

Isaiah 52:14 – He will be so disfigured He won’t even look like a man.

Isaiah 53:2 – He won’t be impressive. He won’t be majestic. He won’t have an appearance that is desirable.

Isaiah 53:3 – He will be despised and rejected by men. He is someone people will look at and turn away from. Someone we won’t value.

Isaiah is certainly not over-hyping expectations.

Who is this servant?

If you look at Isaiah 52:13 it says:

He will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted.

This phrase – raised and lifted up – is used four times in Isaiah.

The other three times it refers to God.

As hard as it is to believe, what Isaiah seems to be saying is that this marred servant – will be God Himself.

In Isaiah 6 – the prophet is told – you will declare My plan of salvation – and no one will believe it.

Who would look at a marred man and think – this is God my Saviour?

But that is what Isaiah 53:1-3 says. He is born – He grows up – then is despised and rejected.

But then in the next three verses we find why He came.

Isaiah 53:4–6:

## The unthinkable option – God Himself will pay the price

Isaiah 53:4–6:

Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all.



Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all.

When Adam sinned – God told Him the consequences of his rebellion.

From this time forward you will deal with thorns and thistles, sickness, pain, rebellion and death.

Adam was sent out of Eden. He walked from a perfect world into a fallen world.

It is hard to imagine how devastating that would be. And cherubim were stationed there with flaming swords so he could not return.

His body aged and grew ill.

Viruses now caused him to become sick.

And it was not just him who suffered.

One of his sons killed the other.

He watched his beloved Eve grow old – he may even have watched her die.

He may well have seen grandchildren and great grandchildren die.

Sin unleashed the horror of suffering and death.

Every man, woman and child ever born came into a world where they would feel pain, become injured, experience illness and finally die.

Illness, war, disaster and death became an inevitable part of life.

Read Genesis 5 – a list of the descendants of Adam – and this list has one thing in common. They lived – so many years – and then they **died**. We all die.

Since suffering and death were caused by sin – the only way to remove suffering and death is to remove sin – forever.

No scientist, politician, religious leader – no one can come up with a cure for sin.

But God can. God did.

He came.

He himself bore our sicknesses.  
He carried our pains.  
He was pierced because of our rebellion.  
He was crushed because of our iniquities.

Jesus chose to lay down His life to end sin, suffering and death.

God didn't just ignore my sin. I was punished in Christ. Justice is paid.

And because of that.

I receive peace.  
I am healed by His wounds.

How does this happen? How is that just? How is that fair?

I don't pretend to understand every aspect of how this can happen. There are mysteries here we can only dimly penetrate.

Let me share my imperfect understanding. I think that here we come to the glory of Christianity. The glory of the cross. The heart of Christianity.

If this doesn't thrill your soul – you don't understand this day.

No other religion or philosophy has a way of dealing with sin against a holy God. *Only* Christianity answers the great question of how sin is dealt with.

By faith – we become united with Jesus *forever*. We are *in* Him – He is *in* us.

What happens to Him happens to us.



My sin is punished. I am punished. But I am in Jesus – covered by Him. This means that when the wrath of God falls on Jesus – I **am** punished – **my** sin is punished. As His blood was poured out – as His life was given up – my sin was paid for.

As He was beaten – by His stripes – I am healed.

As Jesus was crucified – I was crucified.

Romans 6:6:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him.

As the punishment for my sin fell on Jesus – I was cleansed.

1 Peter 2:24:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

That is incredibly good news – but there is a question the Jews in Babylon, the Christians in Ukraine and so many of us ask – why is God waiting to wipe out all evil?

Why doesn't He end it today?

The Bible says – He is waiting until every last one of His sheep is gathered – He is delaying His judgment until then.

But because His mercy waits for others to come – don't think judgment will never come.

That day is coming. He is outraged – He has acted – He will act.

On that day He will remove every last speck of sin and every last effect of sin.

Then there will be:

No war.

No weeping.

No death.

Those who seek His mercy are washed.

Those who refuse it are removed to hell.

One way or another – sin and evil will end.

My plea this morning is – take the good way. The way of the cross. This is yours:

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IF YOU ACCEPT IT



But only – **if you accept it.**

If you have never accepted this gift – the great news is – the last day has not happened. You can still accept it.

If you have – then this is a day of rejoicing.

The cross looks forward to the day all sin ends.

And on that day – we will praise God forever that there is a way our sin can be dealt with other than us paying the price in hell for all eternity – the way of the cross.

Praise God!