Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

Php 3:9 …not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

www.sermonaudio.com/crc
www.unholycharade.com (blog)
www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)
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How Great the Darkness – And Yet there is Light (November 8, 2026)

Sermon Text: Isaiah 1

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5

"Poor England! Leading her free, careless life from day to day, amid endless good-tempered Parliamentary babble, she followed, wondering, along the downward path which led to all she wanted to avoid. She was continually reassured by the leading articles of the most influential newspapers, with some honorable exceptions – and behaved as if all the world were as easy, uncalculating, and well-meaning as herself." [Winston Churchill, The Second World War, The Gathering Storm]

America (and Europe) has been and is in a very similar downgrade as pre-WW2 England was, in this sense – while the enemy arms itself and conspires to over throw our nation, the leading media of the day works – intentionally or naively – as an instrument of deception for the enemy within. This recent election shows the depth to which Americans are lazily allowing themselves to be deceived. When a people do not love God's truth, this is what happens:

2Th 2:10-12 and with all the deception of wickedness for those

who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. (11) For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, (12) in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

The evil which we see all around us in our nation includes, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones exposes in his book on Isaiah 5 [A Nation Under Wrath] , includes:

- Materialism
- Pleasure Mania (hedonism)
- An intentional, willful, going out of the way in order to sin
- Moral Perversion
- Humanism
- Sin in high places
- Willful Opposition to God and His Law

Isa 5:20-24 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (21) Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight! (22) Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine And valiant men in mixing strong drink, (23) Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right! (24) Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble And dry grass collapses into the flame, So their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; For they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Now, what has ancient Israel to do with America and Western Europe today? It is this – God's Word here is not simply addressed to the Jews of Isaiah's day. No, it is addressed to us as well. God has not changed nor has His response to any nation which once claimed to be founded upon Him and His Word, any nation to which He has revealed Himself and sent His gospel of salvation in Christ to, when such a nation rejects Him and scorns His Son.

Isa 1:1-4 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (2) Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. (3) "An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But AMERICA does not know, My people do not understand." (4) Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him.

This despising of the Lord and of His Son, while most intense within the leftist, communist parties, nevertheless it is to be found within the conservative right as well.

Here is America's sin – a sinful nation weighed down with iniquity, a people who have abandoned the Lord, who have despised Him and turned away from Him. And there is already evidence of God's judgment upon the nation, just as Isaiah declared to Israel of his day:

Isa 1:5-8 Where will you be stricken again, As you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint. (6) From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it, Only bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil. (7) Your land is desolate, Your cities are burned with fire, Your fields—strangers are devouring them in your presence; It is desolation, as overthrown by strangers. (8) The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, Like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

The incredible thing is that Isaiah's countrymen, the people of Judah, were blind to it! They refused to connect the dots – their abandonment of the Lord equals the miserable condition of the nation. "*Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your*

rebellion?" What is it going to take from God's hand to bring you to repentance?

The desolation which Isaiah spoke of was due to invasions from Assyria and ultimately from Babylon. The country was already devastated. Invading armies had wiped out the northern kingdom, yet Judah in the south refused to turn from her wicked ways. Here was Jerusalem as a little shack, a hut in a cucumber field. The fields had been decimated by the enemy, yet the people clung to their sins.

It was only by God's preserving grace that there we a few survivors –

> Isa 1:9 Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah.

We will come back to this verse in a moment – you recall that the Apostle Paul quoted it in Romans 11 – the doctrine of the remnant.

Now, let's come to the heart of the matter. What was the greatest evil of Isaiah's countrymen? What sin was it that particularly incited God's wrath against them? And, as direct application –

What sin in our own day and in our own nation particularly kindles God's wrath against America? It is the same sin Isaiah proclaims here:

Isa 1:10-17 Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. (11) "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. (12) "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? (13) "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. (14) "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed

feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. (15) "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. (16) "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, (17) Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

See it? The chief sin of Judah, and the chief sin of America is *idolatrous, formalistic religion, and specifically formalistic (outward forms only, heartless, spiritless, whitewashed tombs) Christianity.* **In other words, <u>the primary blame for God's judgment upon the nation is to be found in the visible, outward 'Christian' church</u>.** And this is the very heart of what we want to emphasize this morning, just as Isaiah pronounced it to his nation long ago.

<u>You Rulers of Sodom and People of Gomorrah</u>

There was no title that Isaiah could have used against these "chosen people of the Lord" than Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus Himself used it to describe Jews of His day who rejected the preaching of the gospel. Who were they? What characterized them? It was this:

They were religious. They:

- Offered many sacrifices, burnt offerings, cattle, bulls, lambs, goats
- They burned incense in the temple
- They observed many religious festivals and feasts
- They prayed with hands outstretched!

They kept the sabbath. To put all of this into contemporary terms: *professing Christians, the visible church members, were in church every Sunday, they offered prayers, they gave their offerings, and yet just like Cain's offering, the Lord took absolutely no pleasure in it all.*

- I have had enough of your offerings
- I take no pleasure in them
- When you come to the church, you trample it with your filth
- Your offerings are worthless and an abomination
- I hate your feasts and festivals
- I hide my eyes and close my ears to your prayers.

Malachi, another prophet of the Lord, proclaimed this in a very similar vein:

Mal 1:6-12 " 'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?' (7) "You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is to be despised.'

(8) "But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts. (9) "But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.

(10) "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you. (11) "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts. (12) "But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.'

Understand? The most wicked sin which incites God's wrath against a people, against a nation, is *a false church, a hypocrite Christianity, a formal worship which is offered by people who actually despise the Lord.* And so it is in our nation today. The chief culprit in America is the visible 'christian' church which is doing exactly what Isaiah and Malachi condemned.

And do not miss the Lord's reaction in that tremendous statement in Malachi 1:10 –

(10) "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you.

Why? What was it that incited this hot wrath of God? This:

"I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly." (Is 13b)

See it? God cannot and will not allow for the mixing of sin and His worship. That is why He struck down Ananias and Sapphira, and it is why He chastised and even killed some of the Corinthians for coming to His table in an unworthy, sinful manner.

And so, to make very sober application to our own nation, and specifically to the churches of our nation today –

How many local churches gather together each Sunday in Christ's name, and yet do so only outwardly, all the while mixing their sin with their false worship without repentance? How many local churches meet with this very call from Christ – 'Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors of the church building and prevent this useless false worship which is an affront to Me!'

Understand? It is better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for Capernaum in the judgment. It is better for Sodom and Gomorrah in the judgment than it will be for many, many professing Christians of our day.

The chief blame for the apostate condition of America is the apostate Christian churches of America. By their false worship, by their mixing their sin with their 'church-going,' they usher in a spiritual darkness over the land.

Mat 6:22-23 "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. (23) "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

The eye of America, that which is to be the gate of God's truth into the nation, is bad. The light is darkness, and how great is the darkness.

No one will receive greater wrath and punishment from the Lord than the false Christian and the false pastors and the false churches.

Isa 29:13-15 Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote, (14) Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed." (15) Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, And whose deeds are done in a dark place, And they say, "Who sees us?" or "Who knows us?"

Let's say it once again – The wickedness which incites the wrath of God more than any other evil is *drawing near to the Lord with mere lip service all the while having hearts far from Him. Mouthing their 'christianity' and creeds while, in their hearts, they actually love their sin and despise the Lord. Who sees them? The Lord sees them!*

Listen to Isaiah describe the sins of such counterfeits who then come to church on Sunday:

- Hands covered with blood. They are responsible for murder – the slaughter of, for example, millions of babies
- They practice evil
- They practice injustice, oppressing the widow and orphan
- Rulers who are corrupt, who associate with thieves, they love and take bribes

And then they come to church on Sunday, presenting themselves as holy saints. The churches accept them and even boast about having them in their membership. God's Word is twisted and perverted so that He is said to love everyone and no one need fear His wrath.

America is, do not doubt it, a nation under wrath. The visible churches in this nation are perfectly described by Isaiah. And it is these false churches who are primarily to blame for God's judgment upon this nation. And by "false church" I do not just mean the openly liberal churches that deny the truth of God's Word. No, the guilt lies also with churches that preach a false gospel – God loves everyone, who assure unsaved people that they are righteous before God, who deny the sovereignty of God, the election of God in salvation, who willingly affirm that Rome is a Christian church.

"Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors so that this worthless, evil false worship could not enter."

<u>So, What is our Hope</u>?

As this great darkness spreads over the land like a plague, what is the hope of Christ's true church? The answer is found in God's sovereignty in salvation and His election of His true church called *the remnant.*

Remnant - Rom 9:27-29 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; (28) FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS

WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY." (29) And just as Isaiah foretold, "UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

This has always been the case –

Rom 9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

Isaac, not Ishmael. Jacob, not Esau. There is the visible, outward descendants of Abraham, but it is only the elect who are the true Israel. And so it is with the visible church.

Gal 6:15-16 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (16) And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the Israel of God.**

The Israel of God is the new creation, created by God Himself. Man can "make" a visible church and man can "make" members of that church, but it is only God who creates, and it is only God who creates and builds His church, the true church, the real Christian.

"I will build My Church."

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, (21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

And so it is, as it was in Elijah's day, that we are tempted to think "We alone are left." But this is wrong thinking. God always keeps His remnant. There IS a true church kept by the Lord, created by the Lord, and He is continuing to add more from all nations to it. If this were not true, Christianity would have come to non-existence long ago.

Isaiah was, as were the other prophets of God, surely very discouraged by the apostate condition of His nation. In fact, as he preached, the Lord had told him this:

> Isa 6:8-13 Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (9) He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' (10) "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." (11) Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate, (12) "The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

But what was Isaiah's hope? It is the same as ours – the remnant:

> (13) "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be subject to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump."

If you are born again, and you MUST be born again, then you are part of that holy seed, that stump which will once day grow again and fill the entire new earth. *We know how the story ends.* Even in these dark days the Lord has given us a certain promise – we are not the only ones and the gates of hell will never prevail.