

# White As Snow

by Rolaant McKenzie



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January and February are usually the coldest and snowiest months during southeastern Michigan winters. One of the loveliest places to visit at this time (or any other season of the year) is Kent Lake. When the weather conditions are right, the lake freezes, making it traversable on foot or skis. Many take advantage of these occasions by setting up ice shanties for fishing.

During these times I do my annual lake hike, where I start from the place where canoes and pontoon boats are rented mid-May through mid-October and walk on the snow-covered frozen water for several miles, circling around until I return to the place where I started. Because of the intrinsic nature of water and the way ice forms, walking on it with a good pair of hiking boots is quite safe.

For most substances, the solid form is heavier than the liquid form. Water is unique in that the solid form (ice) is lighter than the liquid form (water). Water freezes at 32° Fahrenheit (0° Celsius), but it also is a great insulator and good at holding heat. That is why below freezing temperatures for a week or more would be needed for ice to form, and this layer of ice floats on the warmer water and freezes from the top down. God in His marvelous design made it this way, rather than the other way around, to allow fish and other aquatic creatures to survive the winter.

I enjoy the crisp, cold air and the soft crunching white

powder as I walk across the lake. The peace and quiet allows me to leave the stresses and cares of life behind for a little while and enjoy the beauty, majesty, and genius of the Lord's creation. But even more, I am reminded of His invitation through the prophet Isaiah,

"Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, **'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow;** though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.'" (Isaiah 1:18)

The terms *scarlet* and *crimson* are related to a dye used by ancient societies in Spain and countries east of the Mediterranean, such as Israel. It was obtained from the secretions and dead bodies of female *Coccus ilicis*, or scarlet worms, that infested oak trees in the region.

The scarlet worm attaches herself to the wood, forms a hard protective crimson shell under which her larvae hatch. This is the only time in her life that this can take place because the attachment is permanent. Removing the worm at this point would destroy her. In an act of self-sacrifice, the mother sustains the lives of her babies by letting them feed on her body. After a few days when the young can survive apart from her, she dies, and her body discharges a scarlet dye that permanently colors them. The mother's body then turns into something resembling white wax and falls to the ground like snow.

Harvesters would scrape these pea-sized worms from the tree, dry them, and then ground them into powder that was used to dye thread, linen, and garments a deep red. Dipping cotton or wool in this scarlet dye made an indelible color that neither rain, nor washing, nor long usage would remove.

This describes the stain of sin on the human heart. Our sins cling to us like permanent marks on clothing. No external rites, tears, sacrifices, prayers, or any amount of effort on

our part can rid us of them. They are deeply embedded in our hearts, and they stand as accusers of our failings and unrighteousness. Only the power of the Almighty can remove them.

In this seemingly hopeless situation, we can along with King David cry out to God,

**“Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”** (Psalm 51:7)

In the gospel, this prayer is answered by God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His blood shed on the cross washes clean the crimson stains of our sins. Not just those of the past, but of the present and future as well. All of them! Jesus grants all who trust in Him alone reconciliation with God and newness of life. He is the firm and only foundation on which we can stand (Luke 6:47-49; 1 Corinthians 3:11). His grace and forgiveness provide cleansing power that never fades.

As the scarlet worm on the tree gives her life to give life to her children and they partake of her “blood”, Jesus’ flesh and blood shed on another tree (the cross) gives life to anyone who believes the gospel.

Jesus said:

**“... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.** For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.” (John 6:53-58)

As believers we remember this when we take part in the Lord’s Supper, or Communion. We celebrate the perfect sacrifice Jesus

made on the cross for us, the forgiveness of sin and newness of life it provided, by spiritually eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:63) in the bread and wine. We rejoice in what Jesus has completed, paid in full, for us at the cross.

In Jesus, our sins are not transferred somewhere else, waiting to be evaluated to see if we are safe to save or worthy of being in heaven. They are far removed from us by His blood at the cross -- as the prophets of God in the Bible foretold, and what we see in retrospect.

**"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."** (Psalm 103:12)

**"Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."** (Micah 7:18-19)

Crimson reminds us of how deep and dark our sins are and how they separate us from the true life of God, but they also point us to the crimson blood of Jesus that cleanses them and reconciles us to God.

**"But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."** (1 John 1:7)

When I am out on the frozen lake, I remember and rejoice at the refrain from the hymn, *Jesus Paid It All*, written in the spring of 1865 by Elvina M. Hall:

Jesus paid it all,  
All to Him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow.

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