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THE PROPHET ISAIAH'S VISION.

– OCT. 23. – ISA. 6:1-13. –

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." – Isa. 6:8.

PRECEDING lessons have traced for us the history of the ten tribes, Israel, and afterward the two tribes, Judah, down to about the time of Isaiah the prophet. We have noted the truthfulness of the Lord's expression respecting Israel, that they were a "crooked and perverse generation," according to their own history. They were continually gravitating toward [R2371 : page 304] idolatry, and even when corrected and brought back, through divine judgments at the hands of their enemies, their prosperity lasted but a brief season, until they were delving again in idolatry, and required fresh chastisements. The first five chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah are denunciations against Israel and Judah, mingled with exhortations to reformation, in which the Lord calls to them, saying: –

"The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people doth not consider...Wash you, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings from before your eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well....Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; tho your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; tho they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel ye shall be devoured with the sword."

But these divine offers of mercy fell upon heedless ears, and consequently the Lord sent a different message, to which this lesson specially relates. And since the new message would be a difficult one to proclaim, a vision was given to Isaiah to encourage him, and to lead him to *volunteer* to be the bearer of that message. The vision represented the majesty of God, his greatness and glory: and his

holiness is markedly brought to attention by the acclaim of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." In this vision Jehovah presents himself to the attention of Isaiah as a King above all kings, as tho to suggest to the prophet, and to all to whom the vision [R2371 : page 305] would be related, the thought of divine majesty, which ultimately shall be revealed to the whole world of mankind, in the light of whose glory the majesty and tinsel-grandeur of earthly kings will be the veriest dross. The vision is a prophecy of the future, when the "glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" in the establishment of the Kingdom of God during the Millennium. – Isa. 40:5.

Only from this prophetic standpoint would the words of the seraphim be true, for the whole earth has never yet been filled with the Lord's glory. Quite to the contrary, the earth is full of sin and violence, and every evil work prospers under the dominion of the great adversary of God and righteousness, "the prince of this world." But God would have Isaiah, and especially the spiritual "sons" of this Gospel age, for whose benefit the prophet specially wrote (1 Pet. 1:12), know that evil shall not always prevail, but that, as expressed in our dear Redeemer's model prayer, eventually God's Kingdom shall come, and his will shall be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Then, with evil and evil-doers destroyed, and the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth, this prophecy will be fulfilled, and the whole earth shall be full of the Lord's glory. But meantime the Lord's people are to wait patiently for him – for his time for the bringing in of everlasting righteousness. And meantime his servants are to serve him, and to endure opposition from the world, as seeing him who is invisible, and as recognizing the glory of the Lord, which is as yet only in vision and promise.

The repeating of the word "holy" has an intensifying effect, as signifying superlatively holy, most holy. Thus, in vision, did God impress upon his servant, Isaiah, his own holiness and indirectly as well his grace. All the surroundings of the vision were such as to

support these thoughts, the very door-posts being seen to reverberate, and the prophet's own person thrilled with the sight and the message. Naturally and properly, his first thought was of his own unholiness, imperfection, as a member of the fallen race: he felt himself unworthy even to see so great a sight, or to be in the divine presence in vision, and immediately began to lament his own infirmity and his unworthiness, saying, Woe, I am a man whose lips are not clean enough to join with you seraphim in praising the Great King, much as I should like to do so.

Thus we ever find it: those who are brought closest to the divine presence, and who see the divine glories and majesty most distinctly, with the eyes of their understanding, and who realize most fully the holiness and perfection of our God – these feel, more than do others, their own blemishes and shortcomings and unworthiness, altho actually they are far superior to others of the human family, else they would never be granted such insights to the divine plan, character and coming glory. Humility is not only an appropriate grace for all who are blemished through the fall, but it is appropriate also to the angels, for is it not one of the fruits of the holy spirit, as pointed out by the Apostle? Whoever has a deep humility of heart, an intense appreciation of his own demerits, and of the divine perfection, is in a condition of heart ready for divine blessing and for usefulness in the divine service, while the pharisaical, who claim perfection for themselves in thought, word or deed, are in a condition of heart that is deplorable, and are wholly unfit to be used of the Lord as messengers of divine grace.

When Isaiah, in the vision, cried out lamenting his own imperfection, and that his lips were wholly inadequate to the telling of the divine glory, one of the seraphim brought a live coal from off the altar, and therewith touched the prophet's lips. Thus, in the symbolic language of the vision the Lord said to Isaiah: Since you have realized your own blemishes and divine goodness, you shall be granted powers of speech and eloquence and words that are not your own, but which

are beyond your natural ability, and inspired by the Lord; – your lips shall be inspired with the message of the great salvation, the message of love, the fire, the zeal, which shall prompt and consume that sacrifice, and with the grand results which shall flow from it: you may, in your lips at least, be cleansed from all sin, even in advance of the great sacrifice of which you shall speak as my prophet and mouthpiece.

The vision had its designed effect upon Isaiah, establishing more firmly his faith, manifesting to him the divine greatness and power, to him the highest of holy things. Thus Isaiah's heart was quickened with a desire to further engage in the divine service, no matter what the message which the Lord would send. Consequently, when further on in the vision he heard the Lord inquire for a faithful servant, he immediately responded, offering himself, and was accepted, and the message given to him.

Thus it is also with those whom the Lord would specially use in his service during this Gospel age. None are forced into divine service: all soldiers of the cross must be *volunteers* – none will be drafted. The Lord does not even press us to become his servants, but, as was illustrated here with Isaiah, he shows to his faithful his character and plan, and lets them know that he is seeking such to worship and serve him, as worship and serve in spirit and in truth, and this knowledge is his "call." This is quite sufficient for all who have tasted of the Lord's grace appreciatively: for such to know that there is an opportunity of rendering service to the King of kings is to volunteer their services, to pray that the Lord will grant them a privilege of doing **[R2371 : page 306]** all their talents will fit them to do in his service. Only such are true mouthpieces of the Lord. The false prophets and teachers of error are those who affect to serve the Lord's cause, for hire of money or for praise of men, for self-adulation or aggrandizement.

The message of which Isaiah was thus made the channel or mouthpiece of the Lord, was, as already intimated, an unpleasant one.

It was a message to the effect that the divine counsel had already foreseen that all the warnings, threatenings, chastisements, which had come upon Israel and Judah, and which would yet come upon them, would fail to reach their hearts and turn them to repentance; and that, as a consequence, the land would be made desolate, the people being carried away into captivity. Such a message would be difficult to deliver to any people, yet this was the message which the Lord sent, and for which he specially prepared his servant. We are not surprised to learn that the message was resented, and altho Isaiah lived to the good old age of seventy, there seems to be reasonable ground for the truth of the claim made by tradition that he eventually died a martyr's death, being sawn asunder. Even the ray of hope which his message contained, to the effect that *a remnant* of the people would be spared and returned to their land, and that the national hope would thus be revived, was no doubt considered to be the addition of insult to injury by the proud and self-willed people to whom the message was delivered.

It was not long after Isaiah had this vision that the ten tribes were carried away into captivity, and altho a reformation set in with Judah, it was but temporary, and Judah's share in the prophesied captivity occurred about one hundred and fifty years later.

This same message of the Lord was quoted by the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul, as further applicable to Israel, at the first advent, when, on their rejection of Messiah, the nation as a whole was rejected of the Lord and scattered amongst all the nations of the earth, and only a "remnant" of Israelites indeed, who accepted the Messiah, were received into the higher dispensation of divine favor of this Gospel age, as sons of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord. – Matt. 13:13-17; Jno. 1:12; Rom. 11:5-11.

Finding, as we do, in the Scriptures, that natural Israel was a type of nominal spiritual Israel, we are not surprised to find also that there is a somewhat similar message due to the spiritual house now, in the

end of this age. The Lord's message now is that the harvest of the earth is ripe, that the time of harvest has come, [R2372 : page 306] that he is seeking Israelites indeed, that he is gathering out his jewels, which, during the prevalence of evil in the past, have been undergoing polishing to fit and prepare them for coming glory, and to reflect the divine light and beauty. The message now is that nominal Christendom is hereafter to be known as "Babylon," confusion, and that all who are truly the Lord's people are now to hear his voice and to flee out of Mystic Babylon, that they be not partakers of her sins, and that they receive not a share of her plagues from the vials of wrath which shortly shall be poured out upon her. – Rev. 18:1-4.

While the Lord has indeed put into our mouths a new song, that we may show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, and that we may tell of his loving-kindness and his tender mercies over all his works, and that eventually all shall come to a knowledge of the Lord, that they may be saved, if they will, nevertheless, this particular feature of the message of present truth, which calls God's people out of Babylon, is, in many respects, like the message which Isaiah was bidden to deliver to the faithful of Israel in his day: it is a message that is not favorably received; a message that is resented, and that brings upon those who present it, even in the most gentle and loving manner, the maledictions and the scowls of those who love sectarianism and the worship of human theories and creeds better than they love the Lord and his message.

Those who would speak the message of present truth in love, and yet with courage and fearlessness of man, need just such an encouragement as the Lord granted to Isaiah. They need that the eyes of their understanding be granted a *vision* of the King in his beauty; and they need to hear distinctly uttered the fact that ultimately the Lord shall establish his Kingdom, which shall fill the whole earth with his glory. And just such a view and such a message the Lord is now granting to those whom he would use as servants and mouthpieces. The present truth, the eating of the "meat in due season," now provided

by our present Lord, affords his faithful a waking vision of the Lord's glory, never conceived of before, but now clearly recognized by the eye of faith, in the light of the clearer truth. In this light of the divine plan of the ages we indeed see the divine character as never before, – divine wisdom, divine justice, divine love and divine power, fully coordinated, operating in absolute accord in all the great work of our God, comprehending the past, the present and the future.

In this our vision there comes to us also the seraphic testimony, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is [to be] full of his glory." From this standpoint of the future work of our God, through the Millennial Kingdom of the glorified Christ, Head and Body, who shall bless all the families of the earth, we can see divine holiness, love, wisdom and justice, as it is not possible for them to be seen from any other. As it is, those who thus see divine grace in its effulgence, [R2372 : page 307] and who, nevertheless, realize their own imperfection and unworthiness, these it is who to-day have granted to them the opportunity of being mouthpieces of God by being touched with an antitypical coal from the antitypical altar, – touched with the consecration of the great sacrifice. And these are they who are anxious to render service to our Lord, and who are commissioned to bear the message of present truth to others.
