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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill,  
on Tuesday, 14th. May, 1946

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"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Isaiah 6.5

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It is very important that we should have right thoughts of God. Our religion will be solid and weighty, or it will be flimsy and of no value, according as we have right views or superficial views of the most High God. You will find, if you read, whether in the Scriptures or elsewhere, of the exercises of true men of God, eminent servants of the Most High, that there was given to them a very deep and solemn sense of the majesty, the holiness and the glory of God; such a sense as to bow down their souls, sink them into the dust, make them feel their need, make them realise their own abysmal sinnership and great guiltiness. Where the Lord deals thus with a man, that man will be in no mood for trifling, in no mood for trifling in religion and with his own soul. O these things of God and of eternity will be of such weighty import to him as that they will be the principal concern of his life. O how we do lack in these days people whose religion is the first business of their lives. If it is not the first concern of the soul and the first concern of our lives our religion is utterly rotten. Wherever the Lord thus deals with a sinner, he will more or less give him to realise, and realise sufficiently, something of the majesty, the holiness and the glory of God. It was so with Isaiah. The Lord's purpose concerning this man was to make him His minister, he was to be as the mouth of God to the people, and in order to fit him for that solemn office the Lord early gave him this vision which the prophet never forgot, and he never lost the impression which it made upon him. And if God thus impresses anything of the reality of eternal things and of Himself on the heart, that impression is never lost. It may vary as to the sense of it, it may be somewhat obscured at times, but there will be revivings of it.

We read here, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple". The King Uzziah had passed away. He had not been altogether a bad king, his reign had been beneficial in many ways to the people, but he must go the way of all the earth. Kings must die as well as common folk, and King Uzziah had died. And the Lord showed the prophet something for his comfort in those dark days of bereavement, when there was a great sense of national loss. He showed

him a vision of Jehovah sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. "Sitting upon a throne", a throne of majesty, the throne of His holiness, high and lifted up. An eternal throne this, which the Lord sits upon. Kings may come and kings may go, but "the Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted", and His throne is a high throne. It has to be said of earthly power, "there be higher than they"; the greatest earthly power must of necessity be subject unto the Lord, but His throne is high above all other thrones, He is King of kings and Lord of lords. His throne is "high and lifted up", and this truth is full of inexpressible comfort to the people of God when they see so many tumults in the world, see such changes, changes of very solemn and far reaching character, which make them tremble for the future, and they wonder what evils are coming upon the earth. But then, if they get a sight of this throne which is high and lifted up above all the confusion that is upon this earth, and above all the enemies that rise up against the Church of Christ, oh the comfort of it, that He is on the throne, high and lifted up, and He has all things in His Hand! "With power He rules, and wonders performs." "His train filled the temple", and as you know, the temple signifies the church of God, the church which the Lord Jesus has purchased with His own blood, "His train filled the temple". And it is so, although the church is very insignificant in the eyes of man. It has always been the lot of the true church of Christ to walk a path of more or less affliction, to follow Christ barefoot, so to speak, in the paths of tribulation, to follow Him among the thorns; but however dejected she appears in the eyes of the world, and however much she is spoken against, "His train fills the temple". There is a prayer in one of our hymns:

"Enter with all thy glorious train,  
Thy Spirit and Thy Word,  
All that the ark did once contain,  
Could no such grace afford."

"His train filled the temple". We read just now (2 Chron. 5.13,14) how the temple was literally filled with the glory of the Lord so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the glory of the Lord. "His train filled the temple". And when He does come down manifestly and makes His glory to be known and His power felt in His church here on earth, it is a sacred and solemn, yet ultimately a joyful day with His people. O what a great day it is when He displays His power, when He comes forth in the truth of the gospel, and His arrows are sharp in the hearts of His enemies, whereby the people fall under Him. "His train filled the temple".

Then the prophet saw the seraphims. "Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." Here do we not see the holy Father, the holy Son and the holy Spirit? "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke." See the effect upon the prophet. "Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone"; and this is the effect when the Lord displays His power, His majesty and the glory of His holiness in a poor sinner's heart and conscience. That man feels his sinnership, he becomes bowed down with a sense of his unworthiness. He sees sin to be so exceeding sinful, and himself so defiled by sin, that he has to drop his vile head with shame and self-aborrence. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips". A holy light shines into the heart and conscience, and that light reveals the hidden things of darkness. A sinner "begins to discover his colour and make, and says 'I'm all over as any fiend black'". A discovery there is of things that before were not esteemed sinful, were even thought to be virtuous. I have often looked at a ray of light shining through a window, and seen the hundreds of fine specks of dust floating about in the air, only seen in the light of the ray. You look elsewhere, where the rays of light are not so shining, and you cannot see the dust, but where the light shines, as you look at it you see the atmosphere to be filled with dust. I have often thought how it is just like that with the sinner. When the light of the glory of God is made to shine into his poor heart and conscience, then sin hitherto unseen begins to appear, sin becomes exceeding sinful in his view. He sees sin everywhere, sin in every thought, sin in every act, sin in every prayer, sin in every word, sin in every motive, sin in every look; wherever he looks there is sin, whatever proceeds from his own heart, he sees to be polluted with sin, until as Bunyan says, he "sees sin in his prayers and dirt in the bottom of his tears". He sees his repentance to be altogether faulty and to come short. "Woe is me! for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips." And then, how unfit for God, how unfit for God! "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." Now these discoveries of sin and of sinful self are very solemn and very, very killing. They are killing to a man's self-righteousness, his self-esteem, and what Bunyan calls "his pitiful self-holiness", his legal hopes, his carnal expectations, oh the death all this brings upon them. One says,

"A ruined wretch condemned he stands"

The more he looks at himself, the worse the picture appears. He has to look, and look, and look again until his soul is sick of the sight and he abhors himself, as Job says, and repents in dust and ashes. A good place to be brought

to. And you know, where men have this work powerfully and deeply carried on in their hearts and consciences, you will find what a great deal it has to do with the depth of their spirituality in the things of God. You look at such an one as Luther, what travail he had to go through, what a getting worse and worse he had to experience, how hopeless he saw his case to be in itself, but oh, what a minister of the gospel he was made! And what views he had of Christ and of His justifying grace, the value and the freeness of that justification which is in and through a crucified Redeemer! What a firm grip he was favoured to get of it, and what powerful testimony he gave concerning it! If you read of Calvin, you find he went through a long period of sore travail of soul. It was stripping work, it was killing work with him. He had an awful sense of the law of God and the solemnity of having to do with a God so holy and so just, so pure and so glorious, but see how that man was led into the truth of the gospel. What a witness he was made for the truth; his testimony has continued down to these days, and still has its influence in the religious world, very much declined for the most part, but still there is the influence.

And so we might go on, and mention other men of God, and you find all those who were made eminently useful were dealt with in this powerful, gracious, holy way, the Lord killing those whom He makes alive, stripping those whom he will clothe, bringing down to the dust those whom He will lift up. So it was with the prophet, his cry was, "Woe is me! for I am undone", I am undone. His carnal hope perished: everything of his own excellence had to perish, and a very, very merciful thing it is for any sinner to experience the perishing of his rotten hopes, hopes built upon something in self. "Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips". Oh, he saw himself to be a man so unclean in heart and lip as to be unfit to speak to, or to speak for God. "I am a man of unclean lips". How can I pray? Surely if I lift up my voice in prayer it must be an abomination to a holy God. Have you ever felt that your prayers could be no more acceptable at the throne of grace than the grunting of a pig? so defiled are you in every part of your being, and your prayers seem a mass of confusion and sin; "my breath is corrupt". "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips". So this man, you see, had no hope and no ground of comfort in himself - all that was perished - and what we do need in these days is more of this solemn and gracious teaching manifest among us. There are too many people who come by their religion lightly; they have a sort of notion that they are sinners, and then they have a notion that Jesus is a Saviour, and they have a notion that if they accept Him then all will be well, and they will be saved, but it is nothing but notion from

beginning to end. As for a holy God, they have no thought of God as holy, as just, as righteous, as pure. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself". Oh, mean thoughts of God are perilous thoughts to entertain, and it is because people have such superficial thoughts of God, of His holiness, of His justice, that they have such superficial views of salvation. If you have a proper conception of God, of what He is, then a superficial salvation will not meet your case. You will want a salvation as real as your ruin, you will want a forgiveness that puts away all your sins, and all your guiltiness. You will want a remedy that is effectual in the healing of the diseases of your soul. Salvation is a great thing to one who is given a true knowledge of what God is. Salvation is a great thing, and one says of the fear of the Lord, "it makes mercy sweet, salvation great, and all God's judgments right". And it does.

And the fear of the Lord in the soul, where God has given such a solemn discovery of Himself, of His glorious perfections, of His infinite Being, of His eternal majesty, is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. As I said, what a great matter salvation becomes, not to be treated lightly, but says the poor sinner, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

Now the Lord not only discovers, as He did to Isaiah, his sinful and ruined state. "(Did the blind his sight receive nothing but dismal things to see?)" but something more was shown to Isaiah when he said, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts", and that sight, you see, withered up all his religion, turned his righteousness into sin, and laid him as a ruined sinner in the dust.

Then there was shown to him the altar of burnt offering. "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar". This live coal has been interpreted "coal that was stained with the blood of the sacrifices"; at any rate, it was a live coal from off the altar, "and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." So the Lord discovers the need, and the Lord reveals and applies the cleansing sacrifice, and that is just what we need Him to do for us. He must discover then our need, and He, and He alone, can reveal the remedy. He alone can reveal that grace which is sufficient for the needy soul, and He alone can apply it. Those who are made to feel the need of this grace, are made to feel the need of the application - application they must have. They are not content to have these things set before them for them to look at merely, they are not satisfied with just hearing about Christ, and hearing

about the gospel, with having the letter of the truth put in their minds, but they want application;

"Sinners, I read, are justified  
By faith in Jesus' blood;  
But when to me that blood's applied,  
'Tis then it does me good."

And these poor people can get no relief, look where they will, until they get the application; application is what they are after, and it will be the burden of their petitions, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation". "O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul". Deliverance comes by the application of the atonement, and these poor people have to wait for it. They are taught to wait upon God under the pressure of their necessity, and they have to wait upon God, but "the Lord is good to those that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him",

"..And there's a voice of sovereign grace  
Sounds from the sacred word;  
Ho! ye despairing sinners come,  
And trust upon the Lord."

"Wait on the Lord", said the Psalmist, "and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

Has He begun to show you your ruin? Is He making you sick of the repeated sight of the abysmal corruption and the manifold guiltiness of your own heart? the awful hypocrisy, the dreadful deception that your nature is capable of? Do you have to look upon it until you are sick, until you feel ready to perish, until you are tempted that there is no hope for such a vile wretch as you are? Well, who taught you this? Who opened your eyes to see it? "Oh, I am dark, I am dead, I feel death within me". I think it is Rutherford who said that "sense of deadness is a sure sign of life". The dead have no sense of deadness, but the living soul has a sense of deadness. It was the eminent apostle Paul who had the sentence of death, and the effect of it made him cry, "O wretched man that I am". The Lord gives a sense of deadness to make a poor sinner cry, "Let my soul live"; He gives this sense of being undone, of being bankrupt, so foully fallen, so corrupt in every part and power, that He may in due time reveal His great salvation, make known and apply the remedy. He is making room for Christ in a poor sinner's heart. In Isaiah's heart He was making room for the manifestation of His grace of which we just now read. "The live coal from off the altar." It is a wonderful mercy for the Lord to take a dealing with a sinner, a wonderful mercy! "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest him out of thy law that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity until the pit be digged for the wicked." He does not feel a blessed man when he is in the midst of the conflict, when he is so heavily burdened, he feels anything but blessed, but the Lord says

he is blessed. "There is hope in thine end", and why?

"Christ is the friend of sinners,  
Be that forgotten never,  
A wounded soul, and not a whole  
Becomes a true believer"

It is not your trifling professor who becomes a true believer; it is not that man with such light views of God and such trifling thoughts about sin that becomes a true believer. It is this man who is plunged into the ditch until his own clothes abhor him. It is this man who cries out, "I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips", the man who says, "Behold, I am vile. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes". Oh, to this man the Lord will send His gospel in due time as the gospel of his salvation, and so we read of Isaiah the prophet, when he heard that gracious word, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged", what a wonderful sound that was to his ears and in his heart, what an amazing word of grace it was to him! Can you feel this evening that such a word spoken to your heart would be an amazing word of grace, would fill you with wonder, with sweet surprise that you should get it? The Lord help you to wait upon Him for it, remembering this, that your duties and deserts will not bring it to you, no good deeds, good tempers or good frames of yours will procure it. It is a free gift of Christ's grace, and it will come through the atoning sacrifice of the dear Redeemer.

"It was Jesus, my friend, when He hung on the tree  
Who opened the channel of mercy for me."

What is it that keep us in bondage? What is it that causes darkness and confusion in our minds? Why, it is because we are so given, such is the unbelief and legality of our hearts, to looking into self for the ground of our comfort, looking into self to find something that God could be pleased with, looking into self for something that shall give us a warrant to believe that after all we have an interest in Christ. While we are thus looking into self we get nothing but bondage for our pains, nothing but confusion and darkness. But what the Holy Spirit does, is to lead a man out of self to Jesus Christ. There is a beautiful word of Augustine, which I have often thought of, and I wish I might realise more of the true import of it in my heart, "If I have done that for which thou mayest damn me; thou hast not lost that whereby thou mayest save me". Now see what a notable effect this had upon Isaiah the prophet. The poet says,

"The law thy feet will not enlarge  
Nor give thy conscience rest,  
Till thou canst find a full discharge  
Locked up within thy breast."

"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". His heart was enlarged, his tongue set at liberty, and he could run the Lord's errands now as a vessel sanctified and made meet for His use. What a wonder it is that the Lord is able to take a poor vile guilty sinner, and deal with him thus graciously, and sanctify him, and make him a vessel meet for His use. Luther says in his comment on the Galatians, "whom God calls He uses". I have tried sometimes to tell Him that He is able to take even such a sinner as I am and use me as an instrument for His glory. I feel often so defiled, unfit and unworthy to be in the ministry, have many heavy thoughts, many anxieties concerning it, and I try to beg of the Lord that He will do this great thing for me, if it be His holy will. He is able to do it, able to sanctify me and cleanse me, and make me a vessel meet for His use. Oh, He can take a poor, vile sinner, and make him a good minister of Jesus Christ. Nothing is too hard for Him.

And so Isaiah was ready to go. And then the Lord said, "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed but perceive not", and He goes on to tell the prophet what heavy work there was before him, what a people he had to prophesy to, what a reception he would have, and had not the prophet received this vision, designed by the Lord to strengthen and confirm him, he could never have borne up under it, but I believe this did strengthen him and the memory of it was a spur to him as he went forward in humble dependence on Him who had called him to the work.