Isaiah - Commentaries by T.W.P. Wolston, Editor

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“THEN flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs 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” (Isa. 6:6, 7). Surprising mercy! a heavenly messenger, a holy seraphim, sent direct from the Lord Himself upon His throne, to tell Isaiah, a poor sinner on the earth, that his iniquity was taken away! But do not you imagine, dear reader, that you need a seraphim to come to you, ere you can know that your sin is gone. It is not by the action and testimony of a seraphim today, but by the sure action of the Holy Ghost, and the testimony of His everlasting Word, that we know (1 John 5:13).

But how came this all about? “In the year that king Uzziah died,” says Isaiah, “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: 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. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke” (Isa. 6:1-4).

No wonder Isaiah cried, “Woe is me!” &c. (vs. 5). This is the One, sinner, with whom you have to do, the Lord, above whose throne stood the seraphim. Such is His infinite holiness, that even these wondrous creatures, who have never known sin, veil their faces and their feet in His glorious presence. Though holy themselves, and ever dwelling in a scene of holiness, they can neither gaze upon Him, nor stand or walk before Him, without covering their faces and their feet. “Holy, holy, holy; Holy, holy, holy,” cries one to another unceasingly around His throne, “the whole earth is full of his glory.” He who sits thereupon, the Lord, Adonai, is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isa. 57:15). And the posts of the door (or thresholds) moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. The glory of God in judgment is there (Rev. 15:8).

As Isaiah gazes upon this wondrous vision, beholding the enthroned One in His glory, and hears the attendant seraphim celebrating His holiness, whilst the house (or temple) is filled with smoke, he takes his right place before Him, the only place where mercy can reach a sin-stricken sinner in this world. “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” (vs. 5). Not a word issued from his lips in self-justification, or on behalf of the people to whom he belonged. Filled with awe at the holiness of God, and conscious of his sinfulness, and unfitness for His presence, he cries in the bitterness of his soul, “Woe is me! I am undone, I am unclean, I dwell amid the unclean.” ‘Tis enough. The sense of the holiness of the Judge has brought the sinner to self-judgment. His case is hopeless, he can do nothing, and naught but the awful woe of holy and just judgment looms before his soul. He owns he deserves it, crying, “Woe is me!”

Reader, have you ever taken the same place me Isaiah? Have you ever bowed your heart in self-judgment in the presence of infinite holiness? Have you ever seen yourself an undone, unclean, lost one in the presence of God? A sinner you are, for all have sinned; and if you come before Him thus in the day of judgment, eternal woe will be yours. “Woe unto the wicked!” says the scripture, “it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him” (Isa. 3:11). To meet the claims of holiness, you must be holy; and that you are not, but the very opposite. How then can you meet Him? You cannot. It is impossible. Own it then candidly and honestly before Him, and the mercy which reached Isaiah, as we shall see, shall meet you also from this day.

“Woe is me!” was Isaiah’s wail. “Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs 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” (verses 6, 7). The moment Isaiah was self-judged, mercy met him. The seraphim are apparently the agents of mercy from the throne of the Lord; one flew immediately from the Lord to Isaiah. But it was mercy reaching him through righteousness. This is beautifully presented in the vision, and all-important for the sinner to apprehend today. Note carefully what the scripture says: “Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.” Now the altar is the place of sacrifice, and it is here mentioned in the vision for the first time. But neither the seraphim nor Isaiah went to the altar to offer a sacrifice when the latter cried, “Woe is me!” The sacrifice had been offered. The claims of the holiness of God had been met. The fire had consumed the sacrifice. The seraphim had flown to the altar, had taken the live coal, and flown back again to the throne, and there waited till Isaiah cried, “Woe is me!” Immediately the heavenly messenger flashed like lightning through space, straight to the sin-stricken one. In perfect righteousness, the claims of holiness having been met and satisfied, mercy dispensed her bounteous store. The righteous Lord delighteth in mercy. And the seraphim laid the live coal on Isaiah’s mouth, and he heard the message from the Lord, high and lifted up upon His throne: “Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away; and thy sin purged.”

What a blessed picture of the simple Gospel! Are you crying, sinner, “Woe is me! I am undone, I am unclean, I am lost”? Ah, praised be the Lord’s name, you need no holy seraphim to offer a sacrifice, neither need you to bring one yourself; nay, you have none that you could bring. But more than eighteen hundred years ago, Jesus, the Son of the living God, offered Himself a sacrifice for sit upon the altar of God. On the true altar, Calvary’s cross, the Lamb of God’s providing, without blemish and without spot, was offered once for all. The holy fire of God’s judgment fell, but instead of consuming the sacrifice, the holy sacrifice consumed the fire and exhausted it. Jesus was judged; Jesus died and bled. In infinite holiness, God, before whom holy seraphim veil their faces and their feet, hid His face from His beloved, as the claims of righteousness were preferred and met. Enough! “It is finished!” God is glorified; Jesus is raised and exalted at His right hand, and mercy flows through righteousness. Mercy waits to pardon, justify, reconcile, and save.

Take then your place, sinner, whoever you may be, in true repentance before Him, and believe God’s testimony to the worth of the sacrifice of His Son, and, swifter than the swiftest seraphim ever flew through space from the Lord’s holy throne, He will forgive you all your sins for His

name’s sake. The moment you believe His word concerning the finished work, its value will be applied to you, and He Himself say to you, “Thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more,” and, “Thine iniquity is taken away, thy sin purged” (or expiated). Have you bowed, and believed? Hear again His precious word to all such. Christ “was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 4:25, vs. 1).

Do you doubt it? Do you think that Isaiah for a single moment doubted whether he was cleared? Impossible! His lips were touched with the live coal, and he heard the seraphim’s voice assuring him of the canceling of his sin. And the Word of God assures you of forgiveness and justification the moment you believe. God cannot lie, and you dishonor him if you allow a single question as to the truth of His Word.

Forgiven, and justified, you are reconciled to God, and are His child. You belong to Him; you are the purchase of the precious blood of His dear Son. You are no longer your own, but bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Now, as soon as Isaiah’s sin was put away, he heard the Lord’s own voice, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And we read, “Then said I, Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8). Two things are important to observe here. The Lord wanted a servant, and He said, “Whom shall I send?” and “Who will go for us?” Mark it well, for it brings before us His grace, and our responsibility. The Lord sends His servants; but we are not mere machines, and He wants willing ones. Hence He adds, “Who will go?” Isaiah, grateful for the immense mercy shown him, answers unhesitatingly, “Here am I; send me.” He fully recognizes the two points which come out in the Lord’s word. “Here am I,” showed his willingness to go; “send me,” recognized it was no good going unless the Lord sent him. Fellow-believer, we do well to weigh these words. Saved, we are saved to serve. And we can all serve in some way or other. But we need the same two willingness every whit as much as Isaiah.

E. H. C.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 9 (1894), "If Ye Will Inquire, Inquire Ye: Return, Come."

“AND took his journey into a far country,” are words used by the Lord Jesus in the story of the Prodigal Son, to describe the distance the sinner is from God. The son, once at home with the father, is now a long distance from him, and what has put him there? Sin. It is sin that has separated man from God, corrupted and alienated his being. So that he is not only “far of” from God, and stranger to Him, but he is also corrupted in his being, his heart being deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

But the time came when the prodigal was stopped in his mad career, and what is true in the parable is true of every one that ever has been, or ever will be, converted. Reverses, affliction, brought this young man to himself. And such is the way of God in multitudes of cases.

It may be that the reader cannot understand the reverses and afflictions that have come upon him. They have been either sent or permitted of God, and for this reason, He wishes to awaken your soul, to cause you to think seriously of where you are, what you are, and where you are going. It is love divine that leads Him thus to deal with you. He wishes you to return; in fact, to be saved.

The young man “began to be in want” Friend, have you ever known the meaning of those words for yourself? Has a “famine” come upon that which once delighted your poor heart, and appeared to satisfy, but which in reality was a delusion, and are you beginning to realize that there is something wrong between you and God, that you have wronged your Creator, that the distance between Him and you is not that in which man was created, but is the fruit of sin? Are you beginning to be in want? If so, thank God for it; it is but the beginning of brighter days. The discovery of your condition as a sinner, and your distance from God, may be painful, but now necessary, for in the discovery you acquire a sense of need which ends in turning to God. “I must turn to my God,” said a young man, upon whom God allowed the waves of affliction to roll, which swept everything away that his heart could cling to. It resulted in his salvation.

The prodigal turned for the moment to a citizen of that country, but further degradation only awaited him from that quarter. The company of swine and the withholding of the husks that the swine ate, only increased his misery. Can the world, the citizens of the “far country,” assist a soul that is in need? Can they appreciate the trouble and exercise and distress of one that is beginning to be awakened by God to a sense of his great moral distance from Him? Not at all. They can only misunderstand it all. No man gave to this awakening prodigal.

But it worked good for him, for it says, “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father.”

Where, indeed, is the sinner’s resource? Is it in his fellow-men? No. Where is it? It is in God. “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help” (Hos. 13:9). “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

And has not God shown His love in the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus, and already met the need of guilty man in the atoning death of Christ, and provided that which will fit him for His holy presence? “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved. God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the, propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9, 10).

If God can save, these verses show us how God can save. “He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Sin caused the distance; the removal of the sins by the death of Christ opens the way for the return of the repentant sinner.

“He began to be in want.” Have you, dear reader? “He came to himself.” Have you, dear reader? “He arose and came to his father.” Have you, dear reader? Have you returned, or are you on your way back to the Father? The work which is the righteous ground of God justifying a sinner was accomplished on the cross, when Jesus said, “It is finished,” and bowed His head and gave up the ghost; while the blessed God of all grace, through the gracious operations of His Holy Spirit, creates in the heart a sense of need, which leads the sinner to retrace his steps back to God, and to trust in the Saviour who died for him. And the love that purposed man’s salvation, and gave Jesus to die for sinners, now waits to receive all that return. God says, “If ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come” (Isa. 21:12).

Thus we read, “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

What a reception by the father! Wonderful picture of God receiving the sinner just as he is! And on the bosom, and in the ear of the father, were the true place to own in confession the greatness of his sin.

The father would fit him for his house. Thus we hear immediately following the confession of the son the father’s voice, saying, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it: and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”

The “best robe” is a lovely figure of Christ, and all a gift— “the gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17).

The “ring” is a figure, perhaps, of the unending love of our God and Father.

The “shoes” clearly speak of relationship, as in the Eastern countries only the members of the family wear their shoes in the house; the servants leave them at the door.

The “fatted calf” beautifully expresses the communion of the children with the Father in the relationship into which He has brought them.

It is a present relationship that we stand in with God the Father. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” The kiss, the best robe, the shoes, the place at the Father’s table, the joy of His presence, the light of His blessed countenance, are all ours now, if we have returned. It is for us to simply enjoy the relationship and place we have. The father, as he looked at his son, was happy to have him there; and the son, as he looked at the father, could but overflow with thankfulness and praise.

It is thus with God and His people. The believer has joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. But what shall we say of the joy of God the Father! He fills the presence of the angels with His holy joy when a sinner repents, —a joy which but deepens when he is received and fitted for His presence, a joy which will be an “exceeding joy” when the Saviour presents them before the presence of His glory, and a joy that will fill the heart of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, through the eternal ages.

Beloved reader, will you return as a sinner confessed to this blessed God, who so loved you as to give His own Son to die for you? Will you furnish all heaven with an occasion for rejoicing by your return? The blessed God but waits to run forth to meet you, to kiss you, to pardon you, to clothe you, to put, the ring and shoes on, and to bring you into the very bosom of His family as a son, not a hired servant, and make you perfectly happy in His love, and rejoice over you forever. Oh! my friend, I beseech you to come. God says, Come; the Lord Jesus says, Come; the Eternal Spirit says, Come. Oh! won’t you come?

ANON.

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