

PRAYER AS CONFESSION

Text: Isaiah 6.

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 26:1-4, 15b-23.

Intro: Isaiah 6 is an ideal passage to use in studying prayer as confession because it, in a sense, begins on the themes which we have already considered: adoration and thanksgiving. In these forms of prayer we are concerned with God: Who He is, and what He has done.

This is the way Isaiah 6 begins, and it is this which leads to his confession which I want to consider with you tonight.

I. The background: The death of the good king Uzziah.

Uzziah had undoubtedly been a source of great encouragement to Isaiah, but his death, and the circumstances which brought it about (this was certainly a case of "sin unto death") must have overwhelmed Isaiah with discouragement and grief.

Uzziah was a good man who could not succeed at being great.

He dared to take to himself the office of the priest as well as being the king.

It is interesting to note that in Isaiah 6 we find the prophet exactly where the king had been when he sinned so grievously against the Lord--before the altar of incense.

The prophet had come to the temple to find encouragement for his own heart. (How good it is to see that great men of God are, after all, just men! They need to find their peace in the Lord, too.)

II. The vision.

Here he was permitted to see the Lord in His glory.

And what encouragement there is here for Isaiah. Uzziah is no longer on the throne, but God is still on His throne

And there, as Isaiah gazes, he is able to see and to hear the angelic beings as they worship the Lord upon His throne.

What an experience that must have been! Do you remember

what the Lord had told Moses about such a thing?

"Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex. 33:20).

Moses had asked to see the glory of the Lord, and this was the response he got.

Now Isaiah has seen the Lord.

There are at least two NT passages which tell us that the result of seeing the Lord is change:

- (1) 2 Cor. 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."
- (2) 1 John 3:2, "Beloved now are we the sons of God, . . . , when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

What change did it produce in Isaiah? Let us note

III. The confession.

A. Regarding himself.

Isn't it remarkable to read that when a man really sees the Lord he thinks first of all of what that vision means to him, and not how this can be used in giving a message to others?

1. "Woe is me! for I am undone."

This shows Isaiah's utter misery and grief at seeing the Lord.

"Undone" can be translated dead, destroyed. It is " a preterite denoting the fact which, although not outwardly completed, is yet effected so far as a man's own consciousness is concerned" (Delitzsch, Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 195).

Why did Isaiah feel that it was all over for him?

2. "Because I am a man of unclean lips."

What a strange confession for a prophet to make! Unclean lips!

What could he possibly mean?

"Unclean" here means that kind of defilement which disqualifies a man from the presence of God. He could only expect judgment.

But, why does he speak of his "lips"?

I believe that the answer is found in a message which Isaiah was directed by the Lord to give to the people of Judah later on in his ministry. It is found in Isa. 29:13. Let us read it.

As Isaiah listened to the seraphim praising the Lord, and noted the humility (covering themselves) and sincerity of their praise, he immediately became aware of the hypocrisy of his own life.

How easy it is to use words without really making them our own!

D. M. McIntyre says:

"When we acknowledge the depravity of our nature we should endeavour to speak according to the measure of our experience. We can scarcely exaggerate the facts, but we may easily overstate our appreciation of them. . . Above all, we dare not, in confessions which are addressed to a holy God, simulate an experience which we have never known. But let us, as far as God has revealed it to us, confess the deep sin of our nature" (The Hidden Life of Prayer, pp. 66, 67, 68).

Listen to what Hosea told Israel:

"Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips" (Hosea 14:2).

Isaiah had been guilty of uttering words which had not really come from his heart. This is one of the most subtle dangers a child of God can fall into in his relationship with God.

We must come to God with words, but they must be our words. We must do as the Psalmist says, ". . . pour out your heart before Him . . ." (Psa. 62:).

In Matthew 6 and 23 we see how our Lord deplored meaningless words.

To guard Isaiah from falling into more grievous sins (such as Uzziah committed), God must deliver him from a sin which most of us do not pay any attention to: the sin of not being honest with God.

And yet, Uzziah would never have done what he did, if he had been frank to acknowledge the pride which was to destroy him.

Have you ever really opened your heart to the Lord and used your lips to talk to Him about the sins that are there, sins which come to light when we spend time in His presence?

Is there pride there? Is there selfishness? Do you envy someone? Is there hatred there?

Whatever you have, pour it out before God, but let your lips express what your heart desires.

When Isaiah finishes with himself, then he goes on to speak

B. Regarding his people.

They are just like he is. And possibly the thought here is that they are like they are because he has been what he is.

But they need cleansing too.

How did Isaiah discover all of this? It was because he had seen the Lord.

What follows?

IV. The cleansing.

Have you noticed here that Isaiah does not make the mistake that King Uzziah did, in taking the tongs in his own hands?

Instead, the seraphim flew to him, and spoke those wonderful words we find in v. 7. This illustrates 1 John 1:9. When we confess, God cleanses. Oh, the joy of the forgiveness of sins!

Is this the end?

No! Then comes

V. The call.

The rest of the chapter deals with the call.

And would it be going beyond what is indicated here to say that Isaiah must be listed spiritually among the greatest of the OT because early in his ministry God spoke to him about being perfectly honest with the Lord.

Concl: Isn't it true that many times when we feel that we should acknowledge our sinfulness to the Lord that we just don't believe that we have too much to say?

And isn't it equally true that we feel this way because we are so completely blinded to those almost insignificant traits of our hearts. Yet it is out of these that what we call the great sins come.

The only way these can be uncovered is by spending time alone with the Lord, looking at Him as we find Him in the Word.

This was the whole point of Job's experience:

"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" (Job 42: 5, 6).

May it also be ours!