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The Governing Factor of Holiness

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Isaiah 6:1-12.

"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. 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. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. 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. 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: 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. Also 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. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land."

This is a familiar portion, yet it has a message; the power and fullness of which may never have reached our hearts.

May the Lord call us to a full realisation to see and distinguish the particular issue which is bound up with this portion of Scripture so often used as an introduction to worship and made relative to

worship, and often to services - particularly to what is called "missionary service". Neither of these in themselves are the subject of this chapter, they may be relevant, but they are not primary.

The whole question in this chapter is HOLINESS, everything else is set within that and has no place apart from holiness; worship and service are governed by that. The governing factor is holiness.

The conditions surrounding the prophet were very unholy. It was a state of things which was fast heading up to imminent judgment. While other nations and people were brought into the range of judgment specifically, it was to the Lord's people in general. Judgment was to begin in the house of God.

It is very important to remember this. We think of judgment on nations and sinners, but it begins at the house of God. Judgment was imminent, it was hastening on because of the advanced state of unholiness.

What comes in with Isaiah 6? The Lord seeking to secure for Himself an instrument to stand over against that judgment, as outside of it, and proclaiming it, warning, entreating, as representing His mind in contra-distinction to the state of things as they were. Isaiah is that instrument here.

Before going on we can point out that that is God's method continually and ever, right on to the end. Always when a condition contrary to the mind of God is reaching a point which necessitated movement of God in judgment, God has procured an instrument to warn and proclaim against it, but also to embody God's thought about the state of things so utterly contrary, but which has been lost sight of in a more general realm.

I believe this is such a time as that; there is an advanced stage on earth heading right up to judgment, and I believe the judgment is going to begin at the house of God, and before long people who bear the Lord's Name will have to stand and account for the trust deposited with them. In the meantime the Lord would have an instrument, a vessel which will stand with Him over against the course of things, and the inevitable issue. So we see that prophecy is a spiritual faculty; therefore it is not an office, but a spiritual function. What the Lord must have in a day of darkness heading for judgment is a vessel with spiritual understanding; the prophetic element. Isaiah was called for this, and we see what is necessary - separation.

The instrument of God in such a time and condition must be separated before it can be of service. Isaiah was separated from things in which the general mass of God's people were taking a certain course and moving in a certain direction. The instrument must be absolutely separated from it, the vessel of God must stand against its course to break its onward movement as far as possible. That applies to any instrument desiring to be used of God.

The call of Isaiah is to represent God's thought in a day when that was generally lost. God said: "*Your thoughts are not My thoughts, nor My ways your ways.*" "You have altogether lost My mind about things, and have altogether gone a different way."

Isaiah 53 heads it all up - "*All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.*" It is because of spiritual blindness; we have separated from that course which means the embodiment of God's thought and mind in a spiritual instrument to be used of God in a day like this.

Isaiah's Commission

There is a difference between a CALL (for it demands separation on the negative side) and a COMMISSION; that demands something positive. There is a need of cleansing, not from the general course of evil, but from the general state of uncleanness. When Isaiah comes face to face with what God is after, he discovers a particular state of uncleanness. Cleansing from, and separation in particular, are connected with uncleanness, with something specific. He cries: "*Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*" Cleansing from a state in particular is necessary to commission.

What did Isaiah mean "with unclean lips"? Did he mean a blaspheming people, a people given to such thought, such language as not to be fit to be listened to? No! What was it that was wrong with Israel, and that Isaiah had become part of, and was involved in? It was a professing with their lips something which was contradicted in their hearts. "They still... delight... sacrifices". They were still carrying on a ritual and maintaining an external system, but their heart was far from it. "*Drawing nigh unto Me with their lips, but their heart far from Me*". While professing one thing they were another. Their words might be perfectly true as to doctrine, but their background was a lie. There may be a terrible contradiction in the life. If that is so, the lips are unclean in the sight of God. It was that which was bringing judgment from God, not blatant sin and wickedness, such as God being blasphemed or everything of the lowest character morally. It was religious profession; they were still talking in an orthodox way, keeping up something outside yet contradicted in their hearts, so all was a LIE, and a lie is uncleanness.

What was the meaning of unclean lips? Profession not borne out by heart and life. More than that, the Lord said of Capernaum: "*It shall be more tolerable for Sodom than for thee*". You have truth which they did not have. God's severest judgements have been given where light had been given. I think God's judgments will modify for those who have less light. Therefore if an instrument is to be commissioned it has to be cleansed in heart from the very nature of things.

It is not a question of how much truth you have, not "Have I seen so and so?" That is not the matter at all. So many have truth in their heads and on their lips traditionally. The question is: "What about the outworking of that?" Is the living embodiment of God's Life working out in your life? There is no justification in our existing as a repository of doctrine, only doctrines backed up by Life in its full meaning. Other things come under judgment, but the severest are where there has been a lot of light.

So Isaiah must come in a very strong way against things to which he must testify. How will Isaiah come to a place of deliverance? By a personal revelation of the Lord.