

**A.B. Simpson:**

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." (Isa. 6: 1.)

The eighth century before Christ gave birth to the most momentous epochs of ancient history. We find in it the eras both of Babylon and Rome, the two mightiest monarchies of the past. It also saw the fall of Israel and Assyria and the decline of Judah until the kingdom at last fell under Gentile sway. Great events are the mold in which great men are developed and the momentous events of this age developed the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, Isaiah.

Before entering upon his writings in detail, we shall look at the frontispiece which appears in the beginning of the volume, a picture of the prophet himself. It is given in the sixth chapter of his prophecies although chronologically it belongs to an earlier date. The story was deferred until for some years he had actually proved in his experience it and work the truth of the great commission which had been given to him at the beginning.

The story of Isaiah's call and consecration is a living picture which speaks to living men today as personally and practically as when it first became true of the great prophet himself. While history changes from age to age, the nature of God and the needs and experiences of human souls are still the same. May it prove to some who read this chapter a similar call and consecration.

I. "In the year that King Uzziah died." This is not a mere note of time or item of chronology. It suggests a dark background for the picture of divine grace and human consecration which shines out in the story.

The time that King Uzziah died was a very dark one for Judah and doubtless for Isaiah too. He had been the most illustrious of the nation's rulers since the days of David and Solomon. He had carried the banners of his country before mighty and victorious armies until every enemy had been subdued and Judah had almost reached the ancient boundaries of the Abrahamic promise and the days of Solomon, and it is, perhaps, not too much to say that the throne had reached a height of power and influence unequalled by any earthly dynasty at the time. At the same time the trade of the country had kept pace with its military advance and wealth, and prosperity filled all the land with patriotic hope and confidence.

Suddenly all this was interrupted by the death of Uzziah. Nor was it an ordinary death, but overshadowed by the most tragic and dreadful accompaniments. It had come as a stroke of divine judgment because of a fearful and presumptuous sin. Swollen with pride and self-sufficiency, he had presumptuously ventured, in defiance of the warnings of the priesthood, to arrogate to himself the functions of the high priest and had dared to enter the Holy of holies to offer incense with his own hands. Instantly the stroke of heaven fell upon his daring head and he came out a leper as white as snow, and sank to his grave with the fearful badge of heaven's most tremendous judgment resting upon him. The effect of such a catastrophe upon the nation must have been overwhelming, and all the excellence of the brief succeeding reign of Jotham was unable to counteract it.

Isaiah had doubtless shared with others the hopes and dreams which Uzziah's glorious reign had inspired. An intense patriot, and, like all great souls, an enthusiast, Isaiah had entered into the hopes and triumphs of his country with deepest ardor. Doubtless, like most young dreamers, he had built a castle of earthly ambition until its towers had reached to heaven, and had dreamed of the grandeur of his country until it seemed to him that the glowing vision that was already burning in his soul of the latter day glory was to be fulfilled before his eyes and in his own lifetime. But the fearful death of Uzziah shattered his idol and rudely dispelled his early dream, and for a time there seemed nothing before him but desolation and despair.

But at last out of the wreck of his earthly hopes, there burst upon his soul the vision of God and the unseen world where he was henceforth to look for the realization of his shattered earthly dreams. While the throne of Judah was tottering, the everlasting throne was forever unmoved. While earthly heroes might pass away, and earthly ideals be shattered in the dust, God remained forever true, and faith only needed to take the highest flight and look for its realization above. "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." Such an experience as this has to come to every great soul before he is prepared to live both for time and eternity and to be a true prophet for God in the midst of all human vicissitudes.

Such a rude awakening had to come to the disciples of the Master as they too dreamed of an earthly kingdom and wondered that their Master would not allow the enthusiastic multitudes to "take Him by force and make Him a king." Even after His resurrection they still continued to ask: "Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom unto Israel?" Their dreams also were shattered and they saw the Master to whom they looked as the

successor of David and Solomon hanging upon a shameful cross and consigned to a dark and dreary tomb. But out of that rose the vision of the resurrection and that greater coming and better kingdom which He is yet to bring.

So, too, most of us begin our work for God with enthusiastic expectations of earthly success and God has to let us down, as He did Isaiah, until we are prepared to follow the Master outside the camp, to be crucified to earthly honors and triumphs and to look for the realization of our faith and hope in the ages to come.

How often, too, the individual Christian has to be awakened to the vision of God by some such painful shock. You had built your nest securely amid the bowers of love. You had fastened the tendrils of your heart to some sweet face or loved friend; you had dreamed that your security could never be shaken and you had pictured a bright and beautiful earthly future; and lo, instead there came consuming sickness, days and nights of weary pain and the moldering grave. For a while your heart was crushed and your spirit was broken and even life itself had no longer anything in it worth living for. But at last the vision of God began to rise upon your view and the face of Jesus grew real as you looked up through your brimming tears and learned at last that it is only through the wreck of our earthly hopes that we begin to seek the things that cannot pass away, and today, with a chastened peace and a hope that cannot fail, you are thanking God for the day that someone died that you might learn to live.

Or perhaps you had a severer shock, for there is something worse than death. You attached yourself to some human cause, you yielded your confidence and your devotion to some earthly leader. You surrounded him with a halo of your ideals and dreams and you almost worshiped him as God. And then came the rude awakening, the failure of your ideal, the discovery of human weakness, perhaps of sin and shame, and your idol was shattered in the dust and with it all the hopes, ambitions and purposes of your life. Never again would you be deceived into any enterprise of usefulness or service. You had found that "all men are liars," and you were in danger of becoming cynical and sour and losing faith not only in human nature but in all possible virtue and goodness.

It was then that you found God and learned that there was but one true Leader worth worshiping, but one cause worth embracing, but one life worth living, and today you are patiently, hopefully, victoriously pressing on, gathering out of the wreckage of time all that you can, looking for no perfection here, but laying up the fruits of your service in heaven, and some day expecting the Master to show the finished product and to give to you the glad "Well done" and the great reward. We are not fitted for any earthly ministry until we have seen the failure of life and learned to live for the things that cannot pass away.

Dear friend, look up through your tears and your shattered ideals and idols and see God and begin to live for Him and the things that are above.

## II. The vision.

The apostle John tells us that it was Jesus Christ that Isaiah saw in this vision of heavenly glory. "These things said Esaias when he saw His glory and spoke of Him." This was his first view of that glorious Christ, whom above all other ancient seers he beheld afar off and proclaimed as the Hope of the ages. He saw Him "sitting on a throne high and lifted up." It was the vision of the heavenly temple with the seraphim or "the burning ones," His ministers and courtiers.

The expression "high and lifted up" is intended to convey the idea that the God of Isaiah was a very much higher Being than the conceptions and ideals of the people. The God they wanted was a kind of fetish who could help them in their temporal needs and deliver them from their troubles somewhat as the idol of the pagan was expected to answer to his call and deliver him in his difficulties or be soundly abused for not doing so. That is the idea of God that many people have. This little planet is at the present time the center of His greatest activities and the object of His loftiest plans. He is preparing for the advent of His Son upon this earth and here He is to work out through Him the greatest problem of the universe. His supreme purpose is to fill the earth with His glory and for this consummation, everything in earth and heaven is combining.

This was Isaiah's sublime lesson as he listened to the heavenly song and then went forth to be a worker with God in the great plan of bringing back this revolted planet to its orbit around His throne.

Such a vision must come to us before we are truly prepared for the work of God. Then we too will spring to our places in this mighty plan and instead of dreaming about some far off heaven will begin to work to make this green old earth a heaven below.

The heavenly vision had one lesson more for Isaiah, namely: the pattern of true service. He was to go forth into the work of heaven and God permitted him to see the way His servants yonder ministered at His command. The first thing he would be struck with as he gazed upon them was their deep humility. Of their six wings, two were used to cover their faces, two to cover their feet and only two left for flight. They were veiled workers. Even their own transcendent beauty they covered from the sight of others and themselves, and their work, suggested by their feet, was hidden as soon as it was done and they swept on to new commissions without stopping to reflect on what they had done. What a pattern of true service here! God give us the veiled face and the veiled feet.

But again their wings suggested celerity, swiftness and service. They were ready to fly at God's command and fulfil His messages of love without a moment's delay. True service still will be ever ready for "the King's business requires haste."

The next thought suggested by the vision of the seraphim was worship and praise. Our highest service is to glorify Him. Have we given Him the fire-touched lips and is He using them like aeolian harps to respond to His touch and show forth His praise?

### III. The shadow of the vision.

The first effect of this vision was another vision that rose like a dark shadow in the background; the vision of himself. In the light of God's glory and heaven's pure service, he could only see his own utter vileness and cry out, "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 my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." The true vision of God always humbles us and makes us loathe ourselves.

The story is told of a little child from the slums that stumbled into a mission hall where a kindergarten teacher was giving an object lesson to the little grimy children of the streets, in the form of a beautiful white lily. Not a word was spoken, but the children were permitted to gaze upon and even touch that spotless flower. Immediately the wondering eyes of one of the little girls fell upon herself, and with a shadow of shame upon her face she swiftly turned and fled from the building, and never stopped until she got to her miserable garret home. There soap and wash-basin and every little trinket she could find in the way of cleanliness and ornamentation was brought into requisition, and when she returned half an hour later she was transformed. That beautiful lily had shown her herself and had awakened in her a longing for at least external purity. So God reveals us to ourselves.

Has He shown to you the vision, and has it cured you forevermore of ever expecting anything good in that old self, and led you to say, "I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me?"

It is not a good or wholesome thing to be always sitting in judgment upon ourselves in mortification and condemnation. The chagrin and disappointment which we feel, because we expected to find something good in ourselves and have not is oftentimes but the result of pride. True humility, however, has given up self forever, and never again expects to see anything worth approving, but leaving it forever in the bottomless grave of Christ, turns to Him and takes Him and His righteousness as our beauty and our glorious rest. God keep us there.

### IV. The cleansing.

"Then flew one of the seraphim unto me having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar, and he laid it upon my mouth and said: lo, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged."

Thus Isaiah anticipated by eight centuries the glorious promise of John the Baptist and its fulfilment in the story of Pentecost.

If we find no reference here to the atoning blood in the picture of our cleansing, let us remember it is results rather than processes that God is teaching. Behind the fire and the oil we always find the blood in the Old Testament ritual, and the altar here from which the coal was taken suggests the sacrifice which had already been consumed by that altar fire. But the result of Calvary is the Holy Ghost, the baptism of fire that burns up and burns out the life of self and sin and then burns in the blessed image of the Master through the Holy Ghost.

Beloved, have we received that cleansing fire? Thus and thus alone can we be prepared either for holy living or efficient service.

#### V. The call.

Now comes the call to service. But it was not a call so much as a permission. It was not a command so much as the acceptance of a volunteer. With newly cleansed and quickened ears he was able now to hear what had been unheard before, the voice of the heavens. He seemed to have been brought so very near to the council chamber of Jehovah that he was listening to the counsels of the Godhead as they sadly exclaimed, "Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?" Why did not God say at once, "We want you to go." Ah, this is the very secret of true service. The Old Testament servant was a slave, who went because he was told. The New Testament servant is a son and partner, who goes because his heart prompts him. Isaiah rose to the regal height of New Testament sonship, and without compulsion or command, he asked the privilege of being a worker together with God. The moment he understood the thought of God, the plan of heaven and the desire of those glorious beings who were filling the earth with His glory, his heart responded, his life was offered, and the glad and willing cry came forth, "Here am I, send me."

In the beautiful story of David we have the picture of a time when he longed that some one would "give him to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate." He did not send any soldier on such a fearful enterprise, but unconsciously the cry came from his heart for a draft of the waters from the well of his childhood. But that was enough for the three brave men that heard his longing, and, dashing through the ranks of the Philistines, came back with their helmets filled with the waters of Bethlehem's well. That was service so sacred that even David could not bear to drink of such a costly draft. That is true service for our heavenly Master. We are kings and priests unto God. It is royal service He wants. The men who go into the ministry because somebody bids them, or because it offers a professional channel for support, are the ecclesiastical flotsam and jetsam of society, and useless to God and their fellow men. The missionary call is the cry of the heart that has heard the heavenly message and "cannot but" go forth to tell the world of His love.

#### VI. The commission.

His service is accepted, and God says, "Go." But, oh, what a commission! Go, not to triumph, but more frequently to fail. Go, not to be admired and loved, but to be rejected, and at last "sawn asunder." Go, to say, "Lord, who has believed our report?" "All day long have I stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Go, not only to a crucified life but to a crucified ministry. Go, to see the nation go down until at last there is nothing left but the very root of the tree, from which the future growth is yet to spring. Go, not to save the nation, but to gather the remnant out from the nation, the one out of ten who will be willing to hear your voice. And he went, and witnessed and suffered and died. But, oh, the resurrection that has come from the seed Isaiah planted in tears and seeming failure!

Beloved, so He is sending us. Let us not look for an earthly future even in our Christian work. Let us be willing to gather "the remnant," to have "the tenth," to save men one by one for that glorious time and that heavenly temple when He shall manifest our work, and we shall find that our labor has not been "in vain in the Lord."

The writer is indebted to a gifted friend for the fine suggestion of the three epigrammatic words that sum up the teaching of this chapter and the story of a true life.

The first word is "Woe," "Woe is me," a vision of self and its eternal renunciation.

The second word is "Lo," "Lo, this has touched your lips," a revelation of God and the cleansing baptism of the Holy Spirit that prepares us for life and service.

And the third word is "Go," a call to service.

Have we gone through these three chapters of Christian life and service and met the "woe," the "lo," the "go," like the ancient prophet of Jerusalem?