A Vision of Holiness, Salvation and Forgiveness

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Preacher: Rev.Prof. F. Dalrymple-Hamilton

[0:00] to is the subject of vision. Not apocalyptic-type vision, but the vision which you believe God has for you and me, and for this church in particular. So I want to look at Isaiah chapter 6, reading the first eight verses. Isaiah chapter 6, and then at verse 1.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.
And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost. 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 seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.
And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven. And I said, Whom shall I send? I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I. Send me.
And he said, Go and tell this people. Amen. May the Lord bless you. That reading may it be to his praise and glory. Before we come to the word of the Lord, we'll stand and sing this prayer, which I occasionally use because I believe it to be true. Lord, speak to me.
[2:36] Thank you. Thank you.

Yes, thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
[5:32] Thank you.

Thank you. Possibly as a very young man.
And it occurs in the year in which King Uzziah died, 739 BC. The reign of Uzziah was for 52 years, and you can read about that in 2 Kings 15 and in 2 Chronicles 26.
Now, this Uzziah, he was a great king. He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.
It's said of him that he set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper.
[7:17] Four things about him. Four things about him. Like David, his forebear, he extended his rule to include not only the southern nation of Judah, but also the territory of Ashdod and the Philistines, the Arabs and the Ammonites.

Good news for builders. He had an extended building program in Jerusalem by building towers at the corner gate and the valley gate.
Good news for the generals. He built up the army and was exceedingly successful against the enemies of the king. He provided shields, spears, helmets, bows, stones, and all the rest.
And in addition, he fortified Jerusalem with efficient weapons of warfare. We detect with Isaiah being in the temple in the year that King Uzziah died, there's something wrong.
And the something wrong is detailed in 2 Chronicles 26. Because it says there that when he was strong, he grew proud to his destruction.
[8:33] For he was false to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

The result of that action, which was reserved for priests only, was nothing less than the judgment of God. He became a leper until the day of his death.

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So, as far as Isaiah is concerned, this Uzziah, who started off in the right way, doing the right things, had failed.
And so, there are three things about this chapter I want to impart to you. First of all, there's a vision of holiness.
Regarding the seraphim, we read, one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.
[9:37] So, Isaiah has a vision of the supreme holiness of the Lord, the God of Israel. And this throne of God that he saw was attended by the seraphim.

Now, the seraphim are only mentioned in this particular chapter in the Old Testament. And we read about them like this. Above him stood the seraphim.
Each had six wings, and with two he covered his face, two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. Then in verse 6, Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.
So, the first thing you can say about them is that there's more than one of them. Because the name seraphim is a plural formation in the Hebrew language. But there's something else that we can tell about them, and that's their name.
Seraphim. Seraphim is derived from the Hebrew verb seraph, which means to burn up. So, these beings were enveloped in flame.
[10:57] And in the Old Testament, fire is a symbol of the holiness of God. So, from these beings we can see that they were guardians of this holiness.

And what Isaiah saw was this. When he looked at them, they had wings that were folded down. They had wings that were folded up.
And they looked like huge flames surrounding the throne of the Holy One of God. That is the vision. And although he gives us a description of the seraphim, he doesn't do anything like that for the Lord. He simply says, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
For Isaiah, the Lord had become visible in exalted kingliness, with a throne, with robes, attendants, all speaking of sovereign majesty and dominion.
[12:14] He said to be high, lifted up, or exalted. His train is said to fill the temple, by which we may understand that the robes point to the place where this transcendent law touched the earth in all his majesty.

The temple is no mere symbol. It is where the Lord is, the indwelling of God in his house.
And it's to this place that this young man, Isaiah, has gone. Because he's gone in a crisis of faith. Things hadn't turned out the way he expected.
Indeed, he had put his faith and his hope in this man. Now, Isaiah had been in the temple many times before, but he had never seen a vision like this.
And while Uzziah was on the throne, even only nominally, there was always a possibility he could recover. There was always a possibility he could recover some of his former greatness.
[13:29] But with the death of Uzziah, it's passed away. So this experience of a crisis of faith, he turns to the only resource known, the house of the living God.

And yet, to get this vision of the holiness of God transcending from heaven through his temple to his people, there has to be the death of Uzziah.
This was a hard experience to undergo. For he had gone with hopes of revival and a revival of faith. A vision of the holiness of God.
That's what he saw, first of all. The second thing he saw was a vision of salvation.
In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and his train had filled the temple. First of all, a vision of holiness.
[14:46] What was more than that was a vision of salvation. It was not the vision of a Savior in the usually accepted sense of that word. For what he now saw was the Lord in all his glory as a king who cannot die or fail.

This is the impact of what Uzziah is seeing in the temple. I remind you that Uzziah had not died in battle.
He died as a result of leprosy. 2 Kings 15 tells us the Lord smote the king so that he was a leper to the day of his death.

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And he dwelt in a separate house. And Jotham, the king's son, was over the household governing the people of the land.
But there's no getting away from it. He had failed. Now for us, this isn't just a history lesson. And while all that's historical has disappeared, there are spiritual principles here that are relevant to us today.
[16:08] Here we are in the first service of 2018. What kind of year will this be? What will the Lord do among his people?

Returning to 2 Chronicles, we read that when Uzziah was strong, he grew proud to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.
No layman could do that. And what happened was that Azariah, the chief priest, and 80 other priests went in after him.
And these 80 priests of the Lord were men of valor. And they withstood Uzziah and said to him, It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense.
Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord. And Uzziah's response to this was that he lost his temper.
[17:24] He was angry. He had a center in his hand to burn incense. And when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests of the Lord by the altar of incense.

Now, this is all about the failure of Uzziah. But the situation has to be dealt with as it is. And so there's legislation in Leviticus 13 for the recognition of leprosy.
And so we read that Azariah, the chief priest, and all the priests looked at him, and he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly. And he himself hastened to go out because the Lord had smitten him.
now, what about this for Isaiah? The basic problem is Isaiah's got his faith, not in God, but in this king.
And things are never going to be quite the same again. Isaiah had seen how this godly king, Uzziah, had failed his people and his God.
[18:50] But now, he has a different vision, a vision that will change him and his ministry. It's a vision of a heavenly king who does not fail.

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. So, how does this vision of the holiness of God and the unfailing king who is the Lord affect Isaiah?
We find that when this vision was happening, the foundations of a threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.
So, what does Isaiah do now? This is what he says. Woe is me, for I am lost. 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.
what do we make of that? What do we make of Isaiah's confession? Here he's been looking into this temple, and he's seen the Lord in all his majesty.
[20:26] He's seen the holiness of God indicated by the seraphim, and it speaks to him, and he cries out, woe is me.

I am lost. 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.
If you go into the previous chapter, you find that he's got a lot to say about woe. Not about him, but about other people. So, for example, in verse 18 of chapter 5, woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as a cart with ropes, who say, let us make haste, let him speak his word that we may see it.
Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and so on, and so on. Well, it's no longer woe to them, it's woe to me.
That's the difference. And it's because it's speaking into the very depths of his heart that things now go in a different direction.
[21:57] Then flew one of the seraphim to me, and he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.

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So, in this scripture, we see that Isaiah is now given a vision of forgiveness. It is to the effect that the sins of Isaiah are forgiven.
And this comes to him in a highly unusual way, because the action of forgiveness centers on one of the seraphim.
And it is this lone seraph that flies to the altar of burnt offering, which stood at the entrance to the temple, and removed a burning coal.
The text states, verse 6, Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken from tongs from the altar.
[23:05] The way that God dealt with people in the Old Testament foreshadowed the way he would deal with us in Christ.

So, we read in Leviticus 17, 11, it is the blood that makes atonement by a reason of the life. And what was happening here was that this coal was the charred remains of a burnt offering, which had been sacrificed and therefore could effect atonement.
For us, who live in the Christian dispensation, we've been left in no doubt. God has done it once and for all, for all time, through his Son on the cross.
So, 1 John writes, My little children, I am writing this to you, that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.
This gets us to the point of asking, what were the sins of Isaiah? Perhaps he had before him Psalm 90.
[24:45] That's possible. The prayer of Moses, the man of God. And so we read in Psalm 90, verse 7, We are consumed by your anger.

By your wrath, we are overwhelmed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins, in the light of your countenance.
Our secret sins. What sort of sins are these? They are not sins of deed. They are sins of thought. And Jesus himself, identified them. He said, not that which goes into a man defiles a man, and that applies to women as well, but that which comes out.
For out of the heart comes hatred, murder, theft, adultery, fornication, and so on and so on.
[26:08] Now, while it's clear that Isaiah may never have committed any of those, he did have his hope in the wrong place. And he had his hope on Uzziah, this great king.

And so it is this that is now being forgiven. He touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.
He had said, woe is me, for I am lost. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.
Then we find this operation of forgiveness. Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal, which he had taken with tongs from the altar, and he touched my mouth.
In other words, this forgiveness came to Isaiah personally from God via the seraphim, and did so at the point of his personal need.
[27:28] Now, this isn't just Old Testament history. This is a fact today. The Lord Jesus Christ, when he pronounces the word of forgiveness, does so at the point of the person's need, and also always does it personally.

You can hear his voice. And if you go to the Gospels, you can illustrate that many times over. Look at Luke chapter 19, and you'll find the case of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, tax collectors in the ancient world were no more popular than they are today.
He was probably the most hated man in Jericho. He had defrauded everybody to increase his own wealth. He probably had a large house, but there was no one there to share it with because of his occupation.
But Jesus looked up at him and said, Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today.
What's happening? Jesus is meeting Zacchaeus at the point of his need, and he's doing it personally.
[29:03] nobody had ever stayed in the house of Zacchaeus before. And he rejoices, and he's free of all this guilt, of all this deception.

And so he says, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will restore it fourfold.

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He didn't put anything. He had defrauded everybody. Now, to get the peace of mind that he was looking for, it cost him everything.
Today, salvation has come to his house, since he also is a son of Abraham. So, Jesus Christ has met Zacchaeus at the point of his need.
He's here today to meet you at the point of your need. As far as Isaiah is concerned, at the beginning of this study, we saw how he was affected by the death of this godly king, Uzziah.
[30:23] Yet, through this crisis of faith, God has turned his experience round. It's no longer Uzziah, but it's Isaiah.

And through this situation, God has given him a vision of a lord and a king who cannot fail. He's called to him to experience grace and forgiveness on very intimate terms.
So, what do we make of this? This Old Testament history? Is it for the past? It's for the future. It's for now.
God. Because what it tells us and what it speaks to us about is how we see what God is telling us, what we should do, and what this church should do.
And what we require to do is to get our attention off people and on to the Lord who said, I will build my church.
[31:38] The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. That is the word of Jesus. It's a similar thing to what Isaiah saw. The vision of a king who does not and cannot fail.

Amen. Sing finally a hymn by William Cowper, all for a closer walk with God.
Amen. Amen.

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