

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

Isaiah 6:1-8

For one to become a Christian there must be a real, vital and personal experience between the soul and the Saviour. A Christian experience results in a changed life. An inward experience works an outward change or transformation. Claiming an inward experience and continuing to live a sinful life belies one's profession.

An inward experience with Christ which works an outward change in the life prepares a person for active Christian service. Faithful service for Christ flowers into genuine happiness and real usefulness.

As an example of a transforming experience I want to direct your attention to a precious passage from the prolific pen of the peerless prophet, Isaiah. The record of the transforming experience of the prophet in the sixth chapter of Isaiah suggests three things for our consideration.

I. A Vision.

Prior to his transforming experience Isaiah was a hero-worshiper. The idol of his adoration was no less a personage than Uzziah, the king of Judah. Well might the king appeal to the adventurous heart of the young man. When Uzziah ascended the throne of Judah at the age of sixteen, he began his reign as an ardent reformer. Concerning the early part of his reign God's Word says, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (II Chronicles 26:4). Manifesting an unusual interest in the welfare of his subjects, Uzziah erected great towers, built strong defenses and made noteworthy achievements. He overthrew the Philistines, the Ammonites and the Arabians, and gathered a standing army of 307,500. He was so successful and became so popular that multitudes looked to him more than they did to God.

Enervated by such unusual material prosperity and tremendous influence, Uzziah allowed his success to go to his head. Under the spell of his pride, he yielded to that arrogance and presumption which so often accompany success, and went into the temple and sought to be more than king by burning incense at God's altar. Since this was a task that God had assigned to priests only, the high priest and eighty others rebuked him for his presumption, which reprimand he resented very much, whereupon God smote him with leprosy. That terrible disease drove him from the palace to the pesthouse. Royal personage though he was, Uzziah was compelled by the stern requirements of Jewish law to live the rest of his days in isolation. When he died the faith of many seemed to collapse. Among his fondest admirers, upon whom the death of the King had such a depressing effect, was young Isaiah, who had been leaning too heavily upon the friendship and support of the earthly king, rather than upon the wisdom and power of the heavenly Sovereign. It is always an indescribable tragedy when anybody thinks more of any human being than he does of the Lord. Frequently God removes human props so that people will depend on Him.

Now that his hero was dead and buried, bewildered Isaiah made his way to the temple to meditate on God's ways and to find comfort. The Lord's house is the best place for anyone to go in time of sorrow or need. In the temple Isaiah received a vision which made an indelible impression upon him and completely transformed his life and work.

1. It was a vision of the Saviour.

(1) His vision was vivid.

This vision which Isaiah received was so grand in character and so great in its influence on him that he remembered it vividly in every detail. Even the time of its occurrence was stamped upon his memory with indelible accuracy -- "in the year that king Uzziah died." His description of it was as clear as the sunlight.

(2) His vision was vital.

While the death of Uzziah had left Judah's throne empty, it was made clear to Isaiah that the Lord's throne was occupied, so what the prophet had thought was the end was in reality a beginning. His vision was vital because it revealed to him the Saviour. He said, "I saw the Lord." There is no doubt that he saw Christ in His preincarnate glory, for John 12:41 declares: "These things said Esaias, when he saw the glory, and spake of him." Isaiah saw Him in His glory.

(3) His vision was victorious.

When Isaiah could no longer see the earthly king upon his temporal throne, he saw the King of Kings upon His eternal throne. For him it was a golden sunrise after a gloomy sunset. Nothing more wonderful could have happened to him than to have had that vision of the Lord in His loftiness, high above all other kings. One of our great needs today is a vision of our Saviour above the surging sea of selfishness and sin which is all about us. We would do well to have the spirit of the aged John Newton who said, "My mind is failing me, so that I cannot remember many things. But I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and I have a great Saviour."

After seeing the Lord in His holiness, nearness and graciousness, Isaiah also observed some celestial beings, called seraphim, standing near His throne. These ministering servants were standing, which was indicative of the fact that they were ready to do the Lord's bidding. They were full of swift energy, blazing with enthusiasm and glowing with fervent love. "Each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." Why did each one cover his face with two wings? He was overwhelmed with a sense of awe and reverence and was not able to look into the face of the Lord. Why did he cover his feet? His keen sense of unworthiness caused him to do so in order that he might not be seen. Why did he stand with two wings outstretched? He wanted to be ready to go instantly and joyously wherever the Lord might command him to go. He was very anxious to render swift and unquestioning obedience.

2. It was a vision of self.

Just as soon as Isaiah beheld the glory of the Lord and heard the lofty ascription of holy praise chanted to Him, he saw clearly the sinfulness of his own heart. The clearer one's vision of the Lord the keener will be his consciousness of sin. Really one never sees himself until he sees the Lord in His goodness, His grace and His glory. A vision

of the Lord's perfect holiness causes one to realize how far short he has fallen. He discovers his own impurity by gazing on purity. When anybody stands in the presence of the Lord a sense of sin always overwhelms him. When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon His throne, he lost all good opinion of himself. He observed that there was a gulf between the Lord and himself which no effort of his own could ever bridge, so he exclaimed: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips."

3. It was a vision of society.

Isaiah described the condition of human society in the words, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." The prophet was especially mindful of their sins of speech. The lips are an index to the life, the external manifestation of what one really is. Unclean lips signify impure hearts, because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and unclean minds, because thought precedes words.

II. A Voice.

1. Isaiah heard the voice of praise.

As the paeon of praise pealed forth from the lips of the seraphim, Isaiah heard them singing antiphonally, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

There cannot be any true praise apart from obedience. That is exactly why much of the singing today is but solemn mockery in the sight of God. We sing, "I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord," and then refuse to go to a single lost person and talk to him about the Saviour. We sing, "Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee," and then keep it to use for our own selfish purposes. We sing, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold," and refuse to give one dime out of a dollar for the Lord's work. Praise that does not produce practice is a farce and a failure. Worship that does not issue in service is worthless. Profession that does not flower into obedience is a pretense.

2. Isaiah heard the voice of pardon.

When Isaiah sobbed out the confession of his spiritual bankruptcy and repented of his sins, one of the seraphim flew swiftly to him with a live coal in his hand and laid it upon his mouth and said, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Just as soon as he had made a full and frank confession he received the assurance of mercy, pardon and complete cleansing. Forgiveness is still available for every person who comes in penitence and confession. We do not have to wait, plead and beg for pardon.

3. Isaiah heard the voice of purpose.

Following his vision of enlightenment and his experience of cleansing, Isaiah received a divine call to witness and to work for the Lord. He heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The prophet was convinced that the One Who had so graciously cleansed him was appealing to him for service. God does not call for machines but for men. It is His plan to use human beings to do His work in the world.

God certainly needs men to work for Him today. When Missionary Matthew T. Yates was on his deathbed in China, after giving forty years of his life in service for the Lord there, a fellow missionary, Bryan, was by his bedside. The latter saw tears well up in the eyes of the veteran missionary, and he said, "Yates, what's the matter?" He replied, "O, I was just thinking of China and China's need." Brother Bryan said, "It is God's work, and He will take care of it." "Yes," said this pioneer for the Lord, "but God needs men."

It is glorious to have a mountain-top experience, but there is work to be done in the valley. When Christ took Peter, James and John to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, He conferred a great honor upon them, but it carried with it a great obligation. The greater the privilege you have, the greater will be your responsibility. In the valley there was much work to be done -- sickness to be subdued, suffering to be relieved, souls to be introduced to Christ and sorrowing ones to be comforted.

III. A Volunteer.

Isaiah responded to the call of the Lord by saying, "Here am I; send me."

1. Isaiah was an unhesitating volunteer.

He did not ask a single question about the task to which the Lord was calling him. "Then," not some other time, without any hesitation he volunteered to go forth in obedience to the will of God. He did not dally with his duty. He did not postpone the matter until some other time or some more convenient season.

A colored preacher heard another use the word "procrastination." He liked the sound of that big word, so he decided that he would use it for the subject of a sermon. After the service in which he had used it, a brother said to him, "That was a good sermon, but I want to know what that word 'procrastination' means?" The preacher looked wise and said, "Don't you know what procrastination means? Why, that is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Baptists." Well, in reality, it is not a doctrine of Baptists, but it is a practice of many of them. Procrastination keeps many of them from witnessing to their unsaved friends, and consequently it keeps many lost people from being saved.

2. Isaiah was an unselfish volunteer.

Having caught something of the love of the Saviour Whom he had seen, Isaiah manifested an unselfish spirit and volunteered his services to the Lord, saying, "Here am I; send me." He did not say, "Send somebody else," but he said, "Send me." Instead of trying to shirk his responsibility, he willingly and cheerfully accepted it. Thereafter he rendered an unselfish service.

3. Isaiah was an unreserved volunteer.

He did not make any reservations or ask for any concessions. He did not tell the Lord that if He would promise him an easy time, a good salary and a safe journey that he would go for Him. Without consulting anyone, Isaiah committed himself unreservedly into the hands of the Lord saying, "Here am I; send me." He offered himself to the Lord just as he was and with all that he had -- his personality, his possessions and his plans.

The prophet considered it a privilege and an honor to serve the Lord, and he was ready for any sacrifice which might become necessary. His daring declaration indicated his intention of going regardless of the cost. His dedication was complete and he was ready for whatever the Lord had in store for him. No room of his life was reserved for self, but all of the keys were given to the Lord. The choice of a field into which he was to go and to serve, and the terms and conditions under which he was to work were left entirely with the Lord. The prophet traveled under sealed orders and left all directions and details to the One Who had called and commissioned him. Our Lord is still looking for those whom He can trust to carry His message of salvation to the unsaved. Can He depend on you to do your part in this witnessing, which is the greatest task that He has ever committed to men?