

The Throne and the Altar.

Isaiah 6: 1-8.

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In this sublime passage of Scripture we notice two prominent objects, namely, the throne and the altar; and, moreover, we perceive the action of these two objects upon the soul of the prophet. The entire scene is full of interest and instruction. May we gaze upon it aright!

"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." This was a solemn and soul-subduing sight. It is ever a serious matter for a sinner to find himself standing before the throne of God with the unanswered claims of that throne bearing down upon his conscience. Isaiah found it to be so. The light of the throne revealed to him his true condition. And what was that light? It was the moral glory of Christ, as we read in the Gospel of John, "These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him" (Isa. 12: 41). Christ is the perfect standard by which every one must be measured. It matters not what I may think of myself, nor yet what others may think about me: the question is, What am I as viewed in the presence of Christ? The law may tell me what I ought to be; conscience may tell me I am not that; but it is only when the bright beams of Christ's moral glory pour themselves around me that I am enabled to form a just estimate of what I am. Then it is that the hidden chambers of my heart are laid open, the secret springs of action are revealed, the real condition is laid bare.

But perhaps my reader may ask, What do you mean by the moral glory of Christ? I mean the light which shone forth from Him in all His ways when He was down here in this dark world. It was this light that detected man, that disclosed what he was, that brought to light *all* that was in him. It was impossible for any one to escape the action of that light. It was a perfect blaze of divine purity, in view of which the seraphim could only cry out, "Holy, holy, holy!"

Need we marvel then if when Isaiah saw himself in the light of that glory he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone"? Nay; this was the proper utterance of one whose heart had been penetrated to its very centre by a light which makes all things perfectly manifest.

We have no reason to suppose that Isaiah was in any respect worse than his neighbours. We are not told that the catalogue of his sins was heavier or darker than that of thousands around him. He may have been to all human appearance just like others. But ah! only remember, I pray you, where the prophet stood when he exclaimed, "Woe is me!" It was not at the foot of the burning mount when "the ministration of death and condemnation" was given forth amid thunderings and lightnings, blackness, darkness, and tempest. It was not there he stood, though even there a Moses had to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake"; but it was in the presence of the glory of Christ, the Lord God of Israel, that our prophet stood when he saw himself to be "unclean" and "undone." Such was his condition when seen in the light which reveals men and things just as they are.

"*I am undone.*" He does not say, "Woe is me! I am not what I ought to be." No; he saw deeper than this. He stood revealed in the power of a light which reaches to the most profound depths of the soul and discloses "the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Isaiah had never before seen himself in such a light — measured himself by such a rule — weighed himself in such a balance. He now saw himself standing in the presence of Jehovah's throne without any ability whatever to meet the claims of that throne. He "saw Jehovah sitting upon a throne,

high and lifted up." He saw himself a helpless, ruined, guilty sinner at an immeasurable distance from that throne and from the blessed One who sat thereon. He heard the cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy"; and the only response which he could send back from the depths of a broken heart was, "Unclean, unclean, unclean." He beheld a gulf of guilt and uncleanness separating him from Jehovah which no effort of his could ever bridge.

Thus it was with him in that solemn moment when he gave forth that cry of a truly convicted soul, "Woe is me!" He was wholly engrossed with one thought, namely, *his own utter ruin*. He felt himself *a lost man*. He thought not of comparing himself with others, nor of seeking out some fellow-sinner worse than he. Ah, no! a divinely-convicted soul never thinks of such things. There is one grand, all-pervading idea, and that idea is embodied in the words, "I am undone."

And be it carefully noted that the prophet when under the convicting light of the throne is not occupied with what he had done or left undone. The question before his soul was not as to the evil he had done or the good he had left undone. No; it was something far deeper than this. In a word, he was occupied not with his *acts* but with his *condition*. He says, "I *am*" what? Defective in many things? Far behind in my duty? Deplorably short of what I ought to be? No. These and such-like confessions could never embody the experience of a heart on which the bright beams of Jehovah's throne had fallen in convicting power.

True it is "we have done that which we ought not to have done, and left undone that which we ought to have done." But all this is merely the fruit of a nature which is radically corrupt, and when divine light breaks in upon us it will always lead us to the *root*. It will not merely conduct us from leaf to leaf or from branch to branch, but passing down along the trunk it will lay bare the hidden roots of that nature which we inherit by birth from our first parents, and cause us to see that the whole thing is irremediably ruined. Then it is we are constrained to cry out, "Woe is me!" Not because my *conduct* has been defective, but my nature is undone.

Thus it was that Isaiah stood before Jehovah's throne. And oh, what place for a sinner to stand in! There are no excuses there — no palliating circumstances there — no qualifying clauses there — no blaming of men or things there. There is but one object seen there — seen in its guilt, its wretchedness and its ruin, and that object is *self*, and as to that object the tale is easily told. It is all summed up in that most solemn, weighty, suggestive word, "*undone*." Yes; self is undone. That is all that can be said about it. Do what you will with it, and you cannot make it out to be aught but a hopeless, undone thing; and the more speedily and thoroughly this is understood the better.

Many take a long time to learn this foundation truth. They have not, as it were, stood in the full blaze of the throne, and as a consequence they have not been led to cry out with sufficient depth, emphasis or intensity, "I am undone!" It is the glory that shines from the throne which evokes the cry from the very depths of the soul.

All who have ever stood before that throne have given utterance to the same confession, and it will ever be found that just in proportion to our experience of the *light* of the *throne* will be our experience of the *grace* of the *altar*. The two things invariably go together. In this day of *grace* the throne and the altar are connected. In the day of *judgement* "the great white throne" will be seen without any altar. There will be no grace then. The *ruin* will then be seen without the *remedy*, and as for the *result*, it will be eternal perdition. Awful reality! O beware of having to meet the light of the throne without the provision of the altar!

This conducts us, naturally, to the second object in the interesting scene before us, namely, *the altar*. The very moment Isaiah gave utterance to the deep conviction of what he was, he was introduced

to the divine provisions of God's altar. "Then flew one of the seraphim 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."

Here, then, we have the rich provisions of Jehovah's altar, which, be it well remembered, is seen in immediate connection with Jehovah's throne. The two things are intimately connected in the history and experience of every convicted and converted soul. The guilt which the throne detects, the altar removes. If in the light of the throne one object is seen, namely, ruined, guilty, undone self; then, in the light of the altar, one object is seen, namely, a full, precious all-sufficient Christ. The remedy reaches to the full extent of the ruin, and the same light that reveals the one reveals the other likewise. This gives settled repose to the conscience.

God Himself has provided a remedy for all the ruin which the light of His throne has revealed. "This *hath touched* thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Isaiah was brought into personal contact with the sacrifice, and the immediate result was the perfect removal of *all* his iniquity — the perfect purgation of *all* his sin.

Not a single spot remained. He could now stand in the light of that throne which had just detected and exposed his uncleanness and know assuredly by that self-same light that not a speck of uncleanness remained. The very same light which manifested his sin, made manifest also the purging efficacy of the blood.

Such, then, is the precious and beautiful connection between the throne and the altar — a connection which may be easily traced through the inspired volume from Genesis to Revelation, and through the history of God's redeemed from Adam down to the present moment. All who have been really brought to Jesus have experienced the convicting light of the throne and the peace-giving virtues of the altar. All have been made to feel their ruin and cry out, "I am undone!" and all have been brought into personal contact with the sacrifice, and had their sin purged.

God's work is perfect. He convicts perfectly, and He purges perfectly. There is nothing superficial when He carries on His mighty work. The arrow of conviction penetrates to the very centre of the soul, only to be followed by the divine application of that blood which leaves not a stain upon the conscience; and the more deeply we are penetrated by the arrow, the deeper and more settled is our experience of the power of the blood. It is well to be thoroughly searched at the first — well to let the chambers of the heart be fully thrown open to the convicting action of the throne, for then we are sure to get a bolder grasp of that precious atoning blood that speaks peace to every believing heart.

Let me ask you to pause here for a moment and mark the peculiar *style* of the divine action in the case of the prophet.

We all know how much depends upon the way in which a thing is done. A person may do me a favour, but he may do it in such a style as to do away with all the good of it.

Now in the scene before us we not only see a marvellous favour conferred, but conferred after such a fashion as to let us into the very secrets of the bosom of God. The divine remedy was not only applied to Isaiah's felt ruin, but applied in such a way as to let him know assuredly that the whole heart of God was in the application. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me." The rapidity of the movement speaks volumes. It tells us distinctly of Heaven's intense desire to tranquillise the convicted conscience, bind up the broken heart and heal the wounded spirit. The energy of divine love gave swiftness to the seraphic messenger as he winged his way down from Jehovah's throne to where a convicted sinner stood confessing himself "undone."

What a scene! One of those very seraphim that with veiled face stood above Jehovah's throne crying, "Holy, holy, holy," passes from that throne to the altar, and from the altar away down to the deep depths of a convicted sinner's heart, there to apply the balmy virtues of a divine sacrifice. No sooner had the arrow from the throne wounded the heart than the seraph from the altar "flew" to heal the wound. No sooner had the throne poured forth its flood of living light to reveal to the prophet the blackness of his guilt than a tide of love rolled down upon him from the altar and bore away upon its bosom every trace of that guilt. Such is the style — such the manner of the love of God to sinners! Who would not trust Him?

Beloved reader, whosoever you are, in earnest desire for the welfare of your immortal soul, permit me to ask you if you have experienced the action of the throne and the altar? Have you ever retired from all that false light which the enemy of your precious soul would fling around you in order to prevent your getting a true insight into your total ruin? Have you ever stood where Isaiah found himself when he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone"? Have you ever been brought to own from your heart, "I have sinned"? (Job 33) If so, it is your privilege to enter this moment into the rich enjoyment of all that Christ has done for you on the cross.

You do not need to see any vision. You do not require to see a throne, an altar, a flying seraph. You have the Word of God to assure you "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18). That same Word also assures you that "all that believe *are* justified from all things" (Acts 13: 39).

And is not this far better than many visions or many seraphim? Isaiah believed that his "iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged," when the angelic messenger told him so. And should you not believe that Jesus died for you when the Word of God tells you so?

But perhaps you say, "How can I know that Jesus died for *me*? I reply, In the way that any one may know it — simply by the Word of God. There is no other way of knowing it. But you still object, "I do not see my name in the Word of God." No; and even though your name were mentioned this would in no wise satisfy you, inasmuch as there might be hundreds bearing your name. But you see your state, your character, your condition. You see your photograph flung, with divine precision, upon the page of inspiration by the action of that light which makes all things manifest.

Do you not own yourself to be a sinner? — a deep-dyed and ruined sinner? If so the death of Christ applies itself as perfectly to you as the "live coal" did to Isaiah when the seraph declared to him, "This hath touched thy lips." The word is, "If any say I have sinned" — What then? He will send him to hell? No; but "he will deliver him." The very moment you take your true place, and cry out, "Undone!" all that Christ has done, and all that He is becomes yours — yours now — yours for ever. You need not make any effort to improve your condition. Do what you will, and you cannot make yourself anything but undone.

A single effort at improvement is but the evidence that you know not yet how bad, how *incurably* bad you are. You are "undone," and, as such, you have to stand still and see the salvation of God — a salvation the foundation of which was wrought out through the cross of Christ — a salvation which the Holy Ghost reveals on the authority of that Word which is settled for ever in Heaven, and which God "has exalted according to all His name." May the blessed Spirit lead you *now* to put your trust in the name of Jesus, that so, ere you lay down this page, you may know that your "iniquity *is* taken away, and your sin purged"! Then you will be able to follow me while, in a few closing words, I seek to unfold the practical result of all that has been engaging our attention.

We have seen the complete *ruin* of the sinner; we have seen the complete *remedy* in Christ; let us

now look at the *result*, as exhibited in whole-hearted consecration to the service of God. Isaiah had nothing to do for salvation, but he had plenty to do for his Saviour. He had nothing to do to get his sins purged, but plenty to do for the One who had purged them. Now he gave the willing, ready expression of obedience to God when, on hearing that a messenger was needed, he exclaimed, "Here am I; send me." This puts works in their proper place. The order is absolutely perfect. No one can do good works until he has experienced, in some degree, the action of the "throne" and the "altar." The light of the former must show him what he is, and the provisions of the latter must show him what Christ is ere he can say, "Here am I; send me."

This is a settled, universal truth, established in every section of inspiration, and illustrated in the biography of the saints of God and of the servants of Christ in every age, in every condition. All have been brought to see their *ruin* in the light of the throne, to see the *remedy* in the provisions of the altar ere they could exhibit the *result* in a life of practical devotedness. All this is from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Ghost — to whom be all the glory, world without end! Amen and Amen!