**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ISAIAH-007. THE EMPTY THRONE UNFILLED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"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."*

*Isaiah 6:1*

Uzziah had reigned for fifty-two years, during the greater part of which he and his people had been brilliantly prosperous. Victorious in war, he was also successful in the arts of peaceful industry. The later years of his life were clouded, but on the whole the reign had been a time of great well-being. His son and successor was a young man of five-and-twenty; and when he came to the throne ominous war-clouds were gathering in the North, and threatening to drift to Judah. No wonder that the prophet, like other thoughtful patriots, was asking himself what was to come in these anxious days, when the helm was in new hands, which, perhaps, were not strong enough to hold it. Like a wise man, he took his thoughts into the sanctuary; and there he understood. As he brooded, this great vision was disclosed to his inward eye. In the year that King Uzziah died is a great deal more than a date for chronological purposes. It tells us not only the when, but the why, of the vision. The earthly king was laid in the grave; but the prophet saw that the true King of Israel was neither the dead Uzziah nor the young Jotham, but the Lord of hosts. And, seeing that, fears and forebodings and anxieties and the sense of loss, all vanished; and new strength came to Isaiah. He went into the temple laden with anxious thoughts; he came out of it with a springy step and a lightened heart, and the resolve Here am I; send me. There are some lessons that seem to me of great importance for the conduct of our daily life which may be gathered from this remarkable vision, with the remarkable note of time that is appended to it.

Now, before I pass on, let me remind you, in a word, of that apparently audacious commentary upon this great vision, which the Evangelist John gives us: These things said Esaias, when he had beheld His glory and spake of Him. Then the Christ is the manifest Jehovah; is the King of Glory. Then the vision which was but a transitory revelation is the revelation of an eternal reality, and the vision splendid does not fade but brightens, into the light of common day; when instead of being flashed only on the inward eye of a prophet, it is made flesh and walks amongst us, and lives our life, and dies our death. Our eyes have seen the King in as true a reality, and in better fashion, than ever Isaiah did amid the sanctities of the Temple. And the eyes that have seen only the near foreground, the cultivated valleys, and the homes of men, are raised, and lo! the long line of glittering peaks, calm, silent, pure. Who will look at the valleys when the Himalayas stand out, and the veil is drawn aside?

**I. Let me say a word or two about the ministration of loss and sorrow in preparing for the vision.**

It was when King Uzziah died that the prophet saw the Lord sitting upon the throne. If the Throne of Israel had not been empty, he would not have seen the throned God in the heavens. And so it is with all our losses, with all our sorrows, with all our disappointments, with all our pains; they have a mission to reveal to us the throned God. The possession of the things that are taken away from us, the joys which our sorrows smite into dust, have the same mission, and the highest purpose of every good, of every blessing, of every possession, of every gladness, of all love--the highest mission is to lead us to Him. But, just as men will frost a window, so that the light may come in but the sight cannot go out, so by our own fault and misuse of the good things which are meant to lead us up to, and to show us, God, we frost and darken the window so that we cannot see what it is meant to show us. And then a mighty and merciful hand shivers the painted glass into fragments, because it has been dimming the white radiance of Eternity. And though the casement may look gaunt, and the edges of the broken glass may cut and wound, yet the view is unimpeded. When the gifts that we have misused are withdrawn, we can see the heaven that they too often hide from us. When the leaves drop there is a wider prospect. When the great tree is fallen there is opened a view of the blue above. When the night falls the stars sparkle. When other props are struck away we can lean our whole weight upon God. When Uzziah dies the King becomes visible.

Is that what our sorrows, our pains, losses, disappointments do for us? Well for those to whom loss is gain, because it puts them in possession of the enduring riches! Well for those to whom the passing of all that can pass is a means of revealing Him who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever! The message to us of all these our pains and griefs is Come up hither. In them all our Father is saying to us, Seek ye My face. Well for those who answer, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not Thy face far from me.

Let us take care that we do not waste our griefs and sorrows. They absorb us sometimes with vain regrets. They jaundice and embitter us sometimes with rebellious thoughts. They often break the springs of activity and of interest in others, and of sympathy with others. But their true intention is to draw back the thin curtain, and to show us the things that are, the realities of the throned God, the skirts that fill the Temple, the hovering seraphim, and the coal from the altar that purges.

**II. Let me suggest how our text shows us the compensation that is given for all losses.**

As I have pointed out already, the thought conveyed to the prophet by this vision was not only the general one, of God's sovereign rule, but the special one of His rule over and for, and His protection of, the orphan kingdom which had lost its king. The vision took the special shape that the moment required. It was because the earthly king was dead that the living, heavenly King was revealed.

So there is just suggested by it this general thought, that the consciousness of God's presence and work for us takes in each heart the precise shape that its momentary necessities and circumstances require. That infinite fulness is of such a nature as that it will assume any form for which the weakness and the need of the dependent creature call. Like the one force which scientists now are beginning to think underlies all the various manifestations of energy in nature, whether they be named light, heat, motion, electricity, chemical action, or gravitation, the one same vision of the throned God, manifest in Jesus Christ, is protean. Here it flames as light, there burns as heat, there flashes as electricity; here as gravitation holds the atoms together, there as chemical energy separated and decomposes them; here results in motion, there in rest; but is the one force. And so the one God will become everything and anything that every man, and each man, requires. He shapes himself according to our need. The water of life does not disdain to take the form imposed upon it by the vessel into which it is poured. The Jews used to say that the manna in the wilderness tasted to each man as each man desired. And the God, who comes to us all, comes to us each in the shape that we need; just as He came to Isaiah in the manifestation of His kingly power, because the throne of Judah was vacated.

So when our hearts are sore with loss, the New Testament Manifestation of the King, even Jesus Christ, comes to us and says, The same is my mother and sister and brother, and His sweet love compensates for the love that can die, and that has died. When losses come to us He draws near, as durable riches and righteousness. In all our pains He is our anodyne, and in all our griefs He brings the comfort; He is all in all, and each withdrawn gift is compensated, or will be compensated, to each in Him.

So, dear friends, let us learn God's purpose in emptying hearts and chairs and homes. He empties them that He may fill them with Himself. He takes us, if I might so say, into the darkness, as travellers to the south are to-day passing through Alpine tunnels, in order that He may bring us out into the land where God Himself is sun and moon, and where there are ampler ether and brighter constellations than in these lands where we dwell. He means that, when Uzziah dies, our hearts shall see the King. And for all mourners, for all tortured hearts, for all from whom stays have been stricken and resources withdrawn, the old word is true: Lord shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

Let me recall to you what I have already insisted on more than once, that the perfecting of this vision is in the historical fact of the Incarnate Son. Jesus Christ shows us God. Jesus Christ is the King of Glory. If we will go to Him, and fix our eyes and hearts on Him, then losses may come, and we shall be none the poorer; death may unclasp our hands from dear hands, but He will close a dearer one round the hand that is groping for a stay; and nothing can betaken away but He will more than fill the gap it leaves by His own sweet presence. If our eyes behold the King, if we are like John the Seer in his rocky Patmos, and see the Christ in His glory and royalty, then He will lay His hands on us and say, Fear not! Weep not; I am the First and the Last, and forebodings, and fears, and sense of loss will all be changed into trustfulness and patient submission. Seeing Him, who is invisible, we shall be able to endure and to toil, until the time when the vision of earth is perfected by the beholding of heaven. Blessed are they who with purged eyes see, and with yielding hearts obey, the heavenly vision, and turn to the King and offer themselves for any service He may require, saying, Here am I; send me.