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The Ordinances of Heaven

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "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." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also 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: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed." (Isaiah 6:1-10).

"I have... appointed the ordinances of heaven" (Jer. 33:25).

Standing back for a moment from any particular portion of the Word of God, and taking into consideration its whole tenor and teaching, there is one thing with which we find ourselves, and that is this: that if we are to have God in fulness, with all that that means, we must have that which God has revealed as His mind. That is a very general statement, but also it is particular. We must provide

God with that which He has prescribed as His basis and His means for the expression of Himself in fulness. If we only give God parts of what He has shown to be His requirement, we only have God in that measure. Every increase of the Lord will come along the line of His being given what He has indicated as the thing that He requires. Fulness of divine life and light and glory and riches moves along divinely appointed ways, and we cannot have that fulness in any other way.

Paul was instrumental in bringing in a full revelation as to God's eternal counsels, and in connection with that revelation we find ourselves in the presence of a greater fulness of the Lord than anywhere else. No one will question that, when you come to Paul's written ministry, you are in the presence of vastness, fulness, depth. The measure of things has been immensely expanded in all directions. There is still plenty of room to move about in where Paul is concerned that we have not yet touched.

But what we must recognise - and this is the point for the moment - is that that fulness has come along certain clearly defined lines in relation to certain specified things, and it would not come otherwise, it could not come otherwise. God's means are indispensable to God's ends. Isaiah 6 brings to us remarkably and strikingly the four major factors in divine revelation related to the full committal of Himself on the part of God; they are clearly marked. Two of them are mentioned in verse 1 - "*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne... His train filled the temple.*" In verse 5 we have what the first of those means - "*My eyes have seen the King.*" Put the Throne and the King together, they are one thing. The Throne, the Temple. Verse 6, "*having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.*" Then in verse 8, "*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.*" The four major factors of divine revelation are the Throne, the Temple, the Altar and the Ministry, ministry of course of this kind, and they relate inseparably to divine fulness.

Just by way of indicating, before we speak more specifically of these four things, the sovereignty of God operates in relation to one thing, one supreme and ultimate object and end: that is the fulness of Christ, "*...according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ*" (Eph. 1:9-10). The divine sovereignty operates in many ways, and it would be a fascinating half an hour even to look at the many ways clearly defined along which the sovereignty of God moves, but whatever the ways of that sovereignty, however many and diverse, the goal and object is one; what Paul calls "*the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Eph. 3:11). Divine sovereignty, then, is moving to that end, and now because in the case of Israel the divine end is challenged, the state of the people generally makes it impossible for God to move through them toward that end. He acts sovereignly, and this is a sovereign ministry through Isaiah of blinding and deafening and hardening in order to secure that people from amongst them who will see and do see and hear and understand and embody the Lord's full thought. It is sovereignty operating toward God's end to have a people, and when that end, that wonderful end, the divine fulness in a people, is brought into view, these four things are set forth and laid down as basic and fundamental: the throne, the temple, the altar and the ministry. As we look at them separately, we shall see, I think, how that is.

The Throne

The first, the Throne - and it is always the first; the King. "*My eyes have seen the King.*" "*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne.*" When God is moving in relation to fulness, that is the first thing always. Take the book of the Acts. What is the first thing in relation to spiritual fulness? It is the Lord Jesus exalted, on the Throne. That is their message, that is the beginning of everything. "*God highly exalted Him, and*

gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). "He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:20,21). That is where the church takes its rise. It is from that point that everything begins - the absolute and unquestioned sovereignty of the Lord Jesus where those are concerned who are brought into the eternal counsels, the eternal purpose.

Among the various designations which the apostle Paul (the apostle of spiritual fulness) took for himself, was the designation 'herald'. The word is not so translated in our versions, unfortunately, but wherever you find the word 'preacher' or 'preaching' or 'preached' you have in the original the word 'herald', 'heralding'. Paul actually called himself that in both of his letters to Timothy, once in each. *"I was appointed a herald" (1 Tim. 2:7); "Whereunto I was appointed a herald" (2 Tim. 1:11).* Our version is 'a preacher', and the original idea of the herald was one who was called upon to make an official proclamation. He might be sent by the king to make a royal proclamation, or by a prince or by a magistrate or by a military governor, but it was an official proclamation he was called upon to make. Paul used that word in 2 Cor. 4:5: *"We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord", "we herald Christ Jesus as Lord", "we make the proclamation that Christ Jesus is Lord", and the herald made his proclamation, and he did not ask anybody if they would accept what he announced; he did not make it optional at all. You can do what you like about it. You have to recognise this fact. What you do is your responsibility. This is God's fact. "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).*

All that is meant by Christ as absolute Lord in the appointment of God, in Headship, the Head of every man, the Head of the creation, and Head over all things to the church - all that which we have not yet ranged and understood, but all that that means of the perfect Headship, sovereign Lordship, of Jesus Christ in all things, in every detail, is the first basic factor to spiritual fulness. In so far as He has His place in us and in our affairs, that will determine our measure of spiritual fulness, or the measure in which God is with us. The measure of God in fulness is the measure in which Christ is Lord. Of course, that is so familiar to you, that you wonder why there is so much emphasis, but there it is.

Now you can understand why it comes here in Isaiah 6, and point is given to it here because this is set over against Uzziah's presumption. *"In the year that king Uzziah died..."* And you know the story of Uzziah. Uzziah was a great king and brought Israel up to a very high standard, and while he was right, God prospered him until *"his heart was lifted up" (2 Chron. 26:16)*, until pride arose within him, and then he went into the temple of God and approached the altar with incense. The priests appealed to him, pleaded with him, urged him. *"It pertains not unto you, Uzziah";* but he proceeded, he asserted himself in his pride, he presumed upon his kingship, and there he was smitten with leprosy and went out white and leprous, and died a leper. *"In the year that king Uzziah died",* in the year that that presumptuous kind of kingship was smitten, in the year that that assertive headship of man was stricken, *"in the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, highly lifted up... My eyes have seen the King",* and everything is *"Holy, holy, holy"*. That could be more literally and properly translated: *'Exalted, exalted, exalted, is the Lord of hosts'*. It is the dethronement of every other lordship, every rival lordship, every assertive lordship and headship, everything that presses into the things of God, taking the place of the one Lord.

Dr. Campbell Morgan calls Isaiah the prophet of the theocracy - that is, God is King. He works out his analysis on that principle right through these prophecies. Is Israel failing to give God His place? Then, like Uzziah, Israel must be set aside, and another brought in giving God His place. It means a great

deal more than we mean when we say that we make Jesus King and we recognize that He is Lord, and we want Him to be Lord. But most of our troubles come along that line. We have not such absolute confidence in His Lordship, in His wisdom, the sovereignty of His wisdom, the sovereignty of His love. We have not such confidence as to make it impossible for us to have any quarrels with the Lord, disputes, controversies. The Lord is taking a way with us and we do not like it, and we feel very bad about it, and we get ourselves into trouble with the Lord because His sovereign wisdom is choosing a course that is not the one that we would choose, to say the least of it, and while these controversies go on, we say, The Lord does not seem to be interested in us, why should we take His interests to heart? We just give it up, do nothing about it.

While there is anything like that, we are at a standstill spiritually; there can be no possible increase of divine fullness, no possible committal of Himself to us in any further measure. It is all hanging upon this question of His Lordship. It is not till we get down before the Lord and say, "However it seems and whatever I feel about it, You Lord, must have your way; I must get out of Your way, I must come into line with you." We must really deal with the Lord like that. When that is true and thorough, it will be like the opening of a brass gate. There will be spiritual enlargement and growth on our part, and usefulness to the Lord. This kind of ministry is bound to be the end of it all. When He is Lord, there is a ministry of value to Him, serving His sovereign purpose. It begins with the Throne. "Exalted, exalted, exalted is the Lord of hosts."

The House of God

The temple, the house of God. That is the place where God has all His rights, where God is ceded His rights. Now, not to take a lot of time in talking about the temple, let us go right over to the spiritual counterpart of this temple in the New Testament. When we come into the book of the Acts, where first of all He is Lord, the Kingship is established, is settled. The next thing is the house of God, the church, the spiritual temple, but you do not find that the temple is that thing in Jerusalem called the temple by the Jews. Neither is it the upper room where the apostles are meeting. What is it? It is the people themselves. This is a very mobile temple. It is moving up and down the streets, round and round Jerusalem from house to house. It is the people. I do not know where it was that they brought the proceeds of their sales of properties, goods and chattels, and laid them at the apostles' feet, but I do know that there judicial ministry was fulfilled. The Holy Ghost brought in the judicial element.

Ananias and Sapphira met God the Holy Ghost. *"You have not lied unto men, but unto God."* That could have happened anywhere in Jerusalem, out of doors or indoors, because the temple was no longer in one place, one building. It was a people, a people constituted by and on the ground of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Where He is Lord, there is His House, the place where He has His rights. So the temple now in this dispensation is a people gathered into the Name of the Lord Jesus, two or three the minimum, representing the corporate principle. One person cannot represent the temple of God in that full divine sense. Of course, our bodies individually are temples of the Holy Ghost, but that is another meaning from the house of God in the corporate full sense. So there must be the corporate indicated by two or three as a basis, gathered into the Name.

You know the way in which that Name was used at the beginning. "In the name of Jesus". They were challenged - *"In what name have you done this?"* (Acts 4:7). *"In the name of Jesus Christ"*, and God was committing Himself in that Name, and the church was that constituted by the Name which is the Name of the Lord, the King. If the Lord is given this second thing in reality - not a congregation, not just a company of people, a number of people congregating in any given place, but a true corporate

entity gathering into the Name of Jesus on the ground of His Lordship - you know spiritual fullness, increase. There you will have riches, life, light, glory and wealth. Outwardly it is a very simple thing. Inwardly it is a very radical thing to be found in organic union with other believers constituted by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, Whose business it is to honour the Name of the Lord Jesus. And Ananias and Sapphira met the Holy Ghost as the custodian of the Lordship of Christ, and the Holy Ghost exercised that custodianship in the midst of a company, a people who were constituted by His Lordship, who met upon the ground of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

What is the church? It is that which is organically built upon the Name, to which He gives His name. That opens a lot of Old Testament content, as you know - the place of the Name. But just to return to where we started, we said that if we give God what He has laid down and revealed as requisite to His full thought, He comes in on that in fulness. Give God a true spiritual expression of His Son corporately, the House of God which is only Christ corporate, and you find that more than ordinary life and light and spiritual wealth will be found there amongst those people.

The Cross

Thirdly, the altar. *"A live coal... taken with the tongs from off the altar"*. Here is another essential to God. He must have it; He has revealed this as indispensable. What is the immediate value and significance of the altar as indicated in this chapter, and capable of such wide expansion by the Word of God? Well, the altar, of course, is the Old Testament name for the New Testament Cross. But its immediate effect and value is this, that it is that which makes suitable for God's house and God's service. Isaiah saw the Lord, *"My eyes have seen the King."* He saw the temple, the place where God is ceded all His rights, *"Woe is me! for I am undone."* 'I cannot stand here in the presence of this Lord, I cannot enter this temple, I am undone.' *"I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."* A touch of the altar made him suitable for the presence of the Lord and for the house of the Lord. It dealt with the condition which set him aside and ruled him out. It made possible his coming into the place of the thrice-exalted Lord, where all God's rights were secured to Him. *"This has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away"* - by the altar, by the Cross, by its touch.

"Your iniquity is taken away." That word 'iniquity' is the word 'perversity'. Uzziah the perverse; Israel, the perverse; Isaiah was involved in the state of perversity in the nation and was infected himself by that perversity, and with God perversity goes right to the very root of evil. God does not look upon us as just perverse little children. We may look at a little child and say, a very perverse child and make excuses, but God never looks at perversity like that. God, in all perversity, sees its whole history. He sees at a glance the history of that right back up there to the next one on the other side of His Throne, that covering cherub, Lucifer, Son of the Morning; perversity entering into him and heaven, and then later earth being wrecked and ruined by that iniquity. *"Till iniquity was found in you"* (Ezek. 28:15). That is the word of our Authorized translation. "Until perversity was found in you". God sees the whole history of perversity, traces it back to its source and says, This thing is of the devil, and its meaning is rivalry to the very Throne of God. *"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God"* - the perversity of Lucifer and his iniquity.

That very root of Satan in our natures which shows itself in every kind of rebellion, every bit of perversity, has been dealt with in the Cross. You cannot possibly be perverse in the presence of His absolute Lordship. The two things cannot go together. He cannot be King and you be king at the

same time. Heaven could not contain two supreme lords, one had to go. And God's house cannot have two lordships, two wills, two minds; there is only one here.

The Cross deals with the thing that is rivalling God. A rival to God, another will, another mind, another heart, another way - the Cross deals with that and brings us into the place where all His rights are secured. It breaks down all perversity. Uzziah's perversity brought on him leprosy, and then death. Isaiah recognised his perversity and submitted: "I am undone." He did not assert himself; he went down in the dust before the Lord and was cleansed and became a living messenger of God.

In so far as the Lord has what is meant by the altar, the Cross, provided for Him by you and by me, that is the measure of divine fulness and only the measure of divine fullness. And if the Lord is going to get greater fulness in us and if at length the church which is His Body is going to be the fulness of Him that fills all in all, then the Cross will be very utterly applied to that church and to every member thereof. If God is going to secure this body - call it the remnant if you like - this representative company for His full expression, there will be the Cross applied; dealing all the way along with every bit of perversity, resistance, contrariness and everything that is not yielded to the Lord, to make us suitable for that spiritual house which is the fulness of Him.

The Resultant Ministry

Finally, the ministry. "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" Who? Those who have come under the Lordship, who have met the power of the Cross, the altar and who have come into the house of God in this spiritual way - such will fulfil the ministry, such as know that their iniquity is taken away and their sin forgiven. Oh, what a blessed suggestion there is here. You see, the year that Uzziah died was a Jubilee year, and the Jubilee commenced on the evening of the day of atonement. And in the year that king Uzziah died the Lord said to Isaiah, Your sin is atoned for. 'Atoned' is the word in the original; ours is an unfortunate translation. Your sin is atoned for - even better than 'forgiven'. It is atoned for. It is the word here for atonement, 'covered' some translations put it.

What is atonement? It is covering. "Your sin is atoned for." On the eve of the day of Atonement, when Uzziah died because his sin was not forgiven, Isaiah lived and came into new ministry because his sin was atoned for. One exalted himself and there was no atonement; one humbled himself and there was atonement. These are they who can fulfil the ministry, who can respond to the divine need. This was not Isaiah's call to the ministry; that had come some time before and he had fulfilled ministry. This is his new commission. It was as a consequence of these other things to which we have referred that Isaiah was able to say, "*Then said I, Here am I; send me.*" When? 'When I had been made suitable by the Cross for a place in the house of God where only God is known as Lord. When that was so, then I said, "*Here am I; send me*", and He said, "*Go*".'

But do not let us take hold of that wrongly in this way, that we are waiting to be made suitable. The Cross is an accomplished fact. It was accomplished long ago, and in God's mind we were crucified with Christ. All we have to do is to step back two thousand years and say, it happened then; not, it is going to happen tomorrow. "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I... but Christ*". It is something already done to be stepped into, and when we stand by faith into that position, He can say, Go!

This ministry, this new commission which came to Isaiah was not a pleasant one. It was judicial. *"Shut their eyes."* The word is really, 'Smear over their eyes.' *"Make their ears heavy."* *"Make the heart of this people fat."* Take measures so that now, if they want to, they will not be able to; take away their ability. Terrible! *"I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery... that a hardening in part has befallen Israel, until..."* (Rom. 11:25). There is an 'until' at the end of this chapter. Until what? Well, two things. All that has hindered God has been thoroughly dealt with; the other, *"until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in"*, until God has that object of His sovereign purpose from all eternity; then all Israel shall be saved. God has taken out of the nations a people for His Name: that church, which is neither Jew nor Greek and not a conglomeration of them all, but none of them at all. It is Christ as all and in all, Christ corporately expressed; that is the church, the people for His Name.

Isaiah's ministry, under the sovereignty of God, was not, after all, so negative as it looked. It was positive in its object, really only to get out of the way the obstruction to make way for His end. Whatever effect the ministry may have, God's purpose is always positive. It is toward that end of His eternal counsels: the fulness of His Son in a people. That is the ministry which lies to your hand and to mine, in many ways, various ways, diverse ways. That is the ministry. That is there, so to speak, suspended, waiting. Listen to that. Believe that. It is true. You are called to the ministry, every one of you. You have to do nothing in an ecclesiastical or official way to be a minister. You need take no title; you need be given no title. You are called to the ministry of bringing a contribution of some kind toward that ultimate fulness of Christ in one of hundreds of ways, as many ways and many more ways than there are people here this afternoon; called to the one ministry, and it is waiting there. The voice of God is saying, Who? There is only one thing that stands in the way of your response. That is the Lordship of Jesus Christ established by the Cross, making us suitable to have a place in that house of God which serves the rights of God and brings to Him His rights.

"Then said I..." When? It is suspended. God invites us, He is inviting us to the ministry. Who? Here is an invitation to the ministry, but there is a 'then' about it. We cannot respond until all this quarrel with the Lord, these controversies with the Lord, all this perversity, all this recalcitrance, is ended and He is Lord. The Cross has touched perversity and put it away, it is all dealt with by the Cross. Then we are able, we are allowed, to say, "Here am I, send me" and He will say to you, "Yes, go". May the Lord find us in positive value to Himself.