



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

LEVITICAL MINISTRY

Part 2

OUR PRIESTLY MINISTRY

HOLINESS

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CHAPTER 4

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

“Who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ ...” (Rev. 1:2).

“From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5).

“I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:9).

Retaining those fragments in your mind, I would ask you to glance through the following two chapters, to remind yourself of the sevenfold reiteration of that one clause at the close of each message to the seven churches: “To him that overcometh ...”.

We said in our first message that these people who are said to overcome, or who are exhorted to overcome, are all brought together in answer to what is meant by the testimony of Jesus. As you see, the book opens with this threefold reference to “the testimony of Jesus”, which clearly indicates that that is the matter on hand for this whole book. That is the preface; it is all going to be about the testimony of Jesus. As we said, it is significant that, immediately that is presented in the person of Jesus, the next step is to deal with the churches — that is, with the church as a whole, in a representative way in relation to that same testimony of Jesus.

So we come back to this point, that the Lord is ever, right to the end of the dispensation, exhorting His people in the churches or in the church to overcome. This means that such people will be those who embody that testimony of Jesus in a full and unsullied way. For these messages to the churches surely do lead on to the end of the dispensation. The word is: “Behold, I come quickly”; that is the end. If God’s quest for a vessel of the testimony of Jesus continues to the end of the dispensation, however near we may be to the end, we are not at the end yet and that quest goes on.

The Lord still seeks to have a people who do embody and express what is called “the testimony of Jesus”. I trust that your familiarity with the very terms, language and phraseology does not take from the importance and seriousness of the matter. It therefore becomes necessary for us to review what that testimony is.

The testimony of Jesus

You can see from these seven messages to the churches how serious a matter this is with God, how far He is prepared to go in order to have it in both ways. On the one side, in judgement of that which is contrary to the testimony. On the other side, how far He will go with those who overcome. You could not, I think, find it possible to go beyond what is said here as to what the Lord will do for such people. Indeed, He leads them right up to the throne at last, and says, “He that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in My throne.” Surely that is the highest, that is the last and the ultimate.

So how many more things are said here that He will do if He can get a people like this, if He can get a vessel for the testimony of Jesus according to His own mind. On the other hand, some of the most terrible things are said, not to the world, but to the churches or representatively to the church, where things do not correspond to the testimony of Jesus. I say this simply to indicate how important a matter this is with God and that however many good and commendable things there may be, comparative things are not acceptable to God in the ultimate. He will not settle this thing upon a comparative basis.

There are good and commendable things mentioned in the church, but He comes back, “... nevertheless, *nevertheless* I have this against you and unless thou repent ... I will remove your lampstand out of its place.” The comparative ultimate does not pass with God; He is for the absolute, He is for the utter!

So that is what faces us and so we have to look to see what is meant by the testimony of Jesus. And you notice this simple thing at the outset, that here the Lord Jesus is given the simplest of all His designations, ‘the testimony of Jesus.’ It is not of the ‘Lord Jesus’ or any of His other titles, it is simply ‘the testimony of Jesus’. First of all then, it is the testimony of Who and what Jesus was on earth.

We should have no quarrel with the matter of where this begins. It is almost commonplace with us, so wholly accepted, that you might wonder

why it should be mentioned — the fundamental fact that Jesus is the divine Son of God, “God was manifest in the flesh.” “God was in Christ ...”. For Jesus was *God*, and Jesus is *God*. That is a very striking word of the apostle Paul in his letter to Titus: “Looking for the ... appearing ... of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). For us it is not a matter of contention, Christian doctrine; and yet it is something that we should take account of again.

For that reason John was in exile in the isle of Patmos as a prisoner; he was suffering for that testimony. And that explains the suffering of the church at the beginning. It was upon that very point that the Jews crucified Jesus; “He made himself the Son of God”, they said (John 19:7). It was the last thing for them, and for that they put Him to death. And for that testimony the church itself was thrown into the vortex of terrible persecution. We must understand that the persecutions from the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperors were purely on that point. You see, the Caesars were deified; they were called by titles of deity and godhead, and were worshipped as god. Jesus being God was a challenge to that whole system, to that whole authority; hence the persecution from the Roman world. As Christ had been put to death on that very score, so the church was following in His footsteps and being put to death for the same thing.

There is a strange fragment of Scripture, which it is not easy to understand, until you see it in that background. The apostle says: “No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). That sounds strange in itself, if you take it out of its historical context. Anybody can say that Jesus is Lord without the Holy Spirit. You need not be a Christian to say that. But here is the statement: “No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit.” You put yourself into the Roman and Jewish world as it was at that time, and you stand up and say, ‘Jesus is Lord!’, and you will need all the power and boldness of the Holy Spirit to do it. When you use those words about Jesus you put your very life in jeopardy. All the forces of evil, spiritual and temporal, will make you a marked man or woman. If you say Jesus is *Lord*, the cross waits for you; and you will need the Holy Spirit for that. In that realm no one could dare to say it, but by the power and support of the Holy Spirit. It was no easy thing to declare the Lordship and Deity of Jesus Christ in those days. And is it not so today in lands of idolatry and heathenism where Satan has his seat?

The fact is, that when this is a matter which is no longer just a part of a Christian ‘creed’, something that you repeat as a form and formula, but is really, as it was in the beginning, embodied in a people in the power of

the Holy Spirit, then all hell is roused to destroy that testimony. It is very easy to have the language and the phraseology of the testimony without the reality. But have the reality, and you are a marked people. You are marked down by the enemy to be crucified, whatever that may mean. The testimony of Jesus begins there in the spiritual world which is set against the utter, undivided, unquestioned Lordship of Jesus Christ in this universe. It is in that realm that the church really proves its testimony, its value, its significance, its power; it is in the realm of spiritual intelligences that the final proof of the church's reality is known and manifested. It is not what we claim to be on this earth, but what we signify in that whole kingdom of animosity towards Jesus Christ. That is where our accountability is decided and measured. It is in that world that the reality of the testimony of Jesus is tested.

The humanity of Jesus

But then it is not only a matter of His Deity. It is the testimony of *Jesus, the Man*; what He was, as the Man Jesus. That other spiritual world of bitter, vicious hatred of God which is set upon spoiling or destroying everything whether spiritual, moral or material that is of God, has made man its target, through which it seeks to vent its spite upon God. Man is God's chief creation; man is (or was) the very crown of God's creation. In this being, God saw His heritage, His inheritance. Man was made for God's glory; he was made to be the vessel and vehicle of a manifestation of God in glory, power, grace, and goodness in this universe. Man's destiny, in the mind of God, is a very great destiny. God has made this wonderful, beautiful thing, this crown of His creation, and when He has it, He says: 'It is very good!' And then this evil, sinister enemy of God says: 'I will spoil that; I will wreck and ruin the whole thing!' That lies behind what we find of the work of Satan in human history. The Lord Jesus is a Man who satisfies God utterly and absolutely, and is the answer back to the evil one and the evil powers. He is God's vindication.

That is the testimony of Jesus; not only what He is in His Godhead, but what He is in His humanity. We could stay long to dwell upon the perfections and the excellencies of that Man, One upon whom the eyes of the great Creator God could look and say: "I am well pleased". It is no small thing for God, being such as He is with His infinitely high standards, to say of any man: "I am well pleased", or, "In Him is my delight". It is the testimony of Jesus as to what He was to the satisfaction of God and

the answer to God for all His desires concerning man. No wonder Satan hated Him!

The work of Jesus

But then from His Person we pass to His work, for the testimony of Jesus extends to the great work that He did, of course, *because of* what He was and who He was.

Destroying the works of the devil

In the first place, the Son of God was “manifested to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). He began with sin. He took this whole sin matter, this work of evil in human life, with all the curse that had come because of it. He grappled with that terrible, awful thing, sin — I think the Lord would try to impress us with the greatness of holiness by showing us the awfulness of its opposite — He took the whole sin question, and dealt with it, root and branch. He “bare our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). He was “made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). He was “made sin, He who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). All the sin of all time, in every realm and every man, was taken up by Him, and fully, finally dealt with. Thank God! That is the testimony of Jesus.

But that is not all. While He dealt with the thing itself He went to its source, the ‘prince of this world’, the ‘power of darkness’, the ‘spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience’, and all his mighty kingdom, and cast him out. “Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” Yes, He went to Satan himself, and destroyed him. You may say, it does not look like it! Well, it depends on how you look at it.

The sin of Achan

I have been much occupied with an incident and its sequel in the Old Testament, which I may perhaps mention here. It is that terrible incident of Achan (Joshua 7), when the people of God were moving more deeply into the land of covenant. We know how, from the very beginning of that movement towards that land, when they were in Egypt, and then immediately on their exodus, and again at Sinai, the great spiritual enemy had persistently sought to break in and arrest or frustrate that movement by impinging upon the people in one way or another.

Here they are just moving in to the land, and the enemy comes along again, and finds in this man, Achan, a ground of covetousness. It was understood clearly that nothing in that whole land and domain was exempt from the curse that God had pronounced upon it (cf. Deut. 7:1-5). The whole thing — man, woman, and everything else in that realm — lay under the curse, for reasons which we cannot now stop to explain. It was all under the ban, under the curse, and it was understood that it had to be completely ‘devoted’, which meant utterly destroyed. But Achan, in the covetousness of his heart, “took of the devoted thing”, a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment, and hid it in his tent. And the next movement forward was a most disastrous thing. It spelt disaster for all Israel and the whole advance was brought to a standstill.

Their leader Joshua, of course, was distressed and bewildered, wondering why the Lord had allowed this; he almost had a controversy with the Lord about it. But the Lord explained. He said: “Israel hath sinned in the devoted thing” (Josh. 7:1) and commanded that this thing should be tracked down to its very root and source. So their procedure for discovering this sort of thing was set in motion. By a process of elimination, the nation was gradually sifted down, tribe by tribe and household by household, until at last by this divine way of guidance (v.14) they came upon Achan and his family, and he is taken. Joshua said: “My son, give God the glory, and confess what you have done” (v.19). And Achan made his confession, and Joshua, in the wrath and jealousy of God, said: “Why have you troubled us? The Lord shall trouble you this day” (v.25). So they took him, his family, his tent, his animals, and all his possessions and belongings, and stoned them with stones and burned them with fire in the valley of Achor, so that there was nothing left of Achan, his family or belongings but ashes and a great heap of stones.

Curse turned to blessing

That is an example of the kind of situation that the devil can bring about, carrying with it the necessity for God to judge utterly, because of a link with the devil’s kingdom. But what is the sequel? Yes, it *looks* as though Satan triumphs; it does not look as though Satan is a defeated foe. But when we pass over into Isaiah and Hosea, what do we find? “The valley of Achor (shall be) a place for herds to lie down in” (Isa. 65:10). “And I will give ... the valley of Achor for a door of hope” (Hos. 2:15). That signifies judgment past, and the very work of the devil becoming the

ground and way of a new hope. For God is the God of hope. He can turn the works of the devil to His own glory.

That is only in one way; a foreshadowing and picture of Christ crucified being made a curse, and suffering the wrath of God, even to ashes. But the point is this: the devil, by his interfering and breaking into this race, made that *necessary*. In a sense, that is the work of the devil; he has made it necessary for God to judge like that, even to final devastation. But — that is not the end! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). That is the end of the story! It is not devastation and ashes; it is a living hope. That is the sovereign grace, wisdom and power of God. It does not look as though Satan is defeated and off the field, but there is another side to that story. In the sovereign power of God he may be the blind instrument to create a new prospect and a new possibility.

The testimony of Jesus is, not only that He has dealt with sin, and with the source of sin, but that He has dealt with the *result* of sin also. “Through sin came death. Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). But He has gone there too. He has plumbed the depths of death; He has taken death at the flood and has conquered death. Oh, what a mighty thing *Jesus* has done!

A ministry of life and peace

But then, as to His ministry. We have been thinking very much about the Levites, and especially and particularly about that fragment in the prophecies of Malachi: “My covenant was with Levi, of life and peace.” The whole of what I have just been saying is gathered up into the history of the Levites, and I will not go over it again. Suffice it to say that, because of the stand that the Levites took, first at Sinai against sin and the breaking in of the evil powers, and, later, with God for His testimony, to carry the Ark of the testimony forward to its final glory and destination, God made a covenant with Levi, a covenant of life and peace.

That was to say, in effect: they shall be the ministers of life and peace in this world. They shall be a vessel and an embodiment of this twofold thing: life and peace. The effect of their ministry was, on the one hand, *life*. They were countering death all the time. Their ministry related to the altar and to the blood, countering death and countering sin, which meant preserving life and the way of life. They were countering the anger of God

against sin, and God's controversy with man because of sin; countering it by the altar, satisfying God in the propitiation for sin. They were therefore holding a ministry of *peace*, both with God and from God.

The Levites are only a type of the Lord Jesus, who is the great and inclusive Levite. What is His ministry? Because of that which He is, and that which He has done, of which we have spoken, His ministry to us and to the world is life and peace. We who love the Lord are a testimony to the testimony of Jesus: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ", and we have life by Him and in Him. That is the testimony of Jesus.

In closing, we bring again into view these people who are appealed to: "To him that overcometh ...", "To him that overcometh ...". That is, a people who will embody this testimony. I am quite sure that that is what is meant in these messages. It is a counter to the sin which Satan himself has introduced among the Lord's people; it is the counter to spiritual death, which is the result of corruption and pollution, such as we find there in the churches. It is a people who stand clear of all that, who will stand against it, and who will, by the help of God, resist the inroads and evil work of Satan to spoil what is of God.

That, in brief, is what is signified by "he that overcometh ...". They are not an elect body; they are not a 'spiritual aristocracy' chosen for this purpose. Any true believer can be, and should be, one of those. Indeed, it is what the whole church ought to be. As the Levites represented all Israel, they represented God for all Israel. And because, as we find here in these churches, all the spiritual Israel is not like that, God moves in an inward way to have a Levite people in the midst of His people. He must have them, and those are they that overcome, the true Levites. They are to take up what is true of the Lord Jesus Himself; firstly in themselves as in Him, a holy people; and then, because they are a holy people, to exercise a ministry of life and peace.

The ministering of life to those who need life, and even to the Lord's people, requires a people like this. Many of the Lord's people are not really in life, and there are many like Cornelius and his friends, very devout and sincere and, in a way, God-fearing and religious, but, until the Holy Spirit comes to them, not in life. If there is to be a ministry of life to any such as these, it requires a people after this kind. This is a holy life, and this life cannot be ministered through unholy channels. "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11).

We are called to a great ministry, a wonderful ministry, the ministry

of His life and His peace. It is committed to us. It is a wonderful thing to realize that it is possible for men and women, in holy fellowship with the Lord, to be the vehicles of His life to others, ministering life to them, asking life for them, as John puts it (1 John 5:16). And to minister His peace, to minister the reconciliation of God to souls, is a wonderful thing. But the ministry rests upon the condition of a holy people. The Lord make us like that, and really have in us a vessel of the testimony of Jesus.

Concluded

OUR PRIESTLY MINISTRY

Reading: 2 Kings 11:1-16; Matt. 2:16.

In this eleventh chapter of the second book of Kings, we have an incident, the significance of which runs not only from its own time to this day, but right through the whole history of this world. It is the question of the throne and of the triumph of the Lord's testimony, or the Lord's triumph with His testimony.

The adversary

Here we have in Athaliah one who so evidently represents that which is wrong and false, one of several women who in history occupied a place of great power and influence to no good purpose, but rather to the subverting of the Lord's testimony. She is so very closely linked with Jezebel, as you will see by the chapters nearby. She is not far on the road of descent from Ahab and Jezebel. Indeed, they have only just come under the terrible judgment of God. Jehu has just wrought God's judgment and vengeance upon the house of Ahab and upon Jezebel, and then Athaliah comes up in that evil succession, the wife of Joram, the successor of Ahab. And we recall a word in the book of the Revelation in one of the messages of the Lord to the churches that He had this against them, that they had there that woman Jezebel who taught Israel to commit fornication. This woman Jezebel, in principle, was occupying a place of great influence among the Lord's people to the undermining of His testimony, undoubtedly inspired by Satan himself for the total destruction of that testimony. When Jehu had slain her son who represents her power of succession, in influence, in domination, then the whole thing breaks loose and is manifested in that she rises to destroy all the royal seed with the intent that there shall be no rival to her position or that of her son.

Well, the thing which is here so patently is the survival of the Lord's testimony, and that testimony being preserved unto the throne in the face of a fierce, relentless and evil adversary. We have said that that which

Athaliah represents is found running right through the Scripture from the beginning. When Satan inspired Cain to murder Abel, it was exactly the same thing. That seed of the Lord through which the Lord's testimony was to be carried on, and at last come to the throne, was the object then. So it has ever been. The same thing is found in Moses when Pharaoh ordered the destruction of the male children. So it was with Herod. A rival to his influence and power and continuance had arisen, and Satan will tolerate no rivals. The seed royal is marked down by him, and that devil incarnate, Herod, destroys all the male children of two years and upward with the object of getting at that chosen One with whom and in whom the testimony is bound up, who represents the menace to Satan's kingdom. In Revelation 12 we find the final exhibition of this same thing at work.

It is very interesting to notice one little phrase that recurs. It says here, "Now when Athaliah ... saw ...". Then in Matthew 2 it is, "When Herod saw ..." (v.16), and in Revelation 12:13, "When the dragon saw ...". Three times that phrase is used in this same connection — the recognising of the significance of what was happening, what it meant to the enemy. When they saw, they were very wrath, and broke out against the seed royal. I think it unnecessary to deal with each fragment and point at any length. We see what Athaliah stands for in principle, that spiritual thing manifesting itself again and again through persons in history, ever and always out against that seed. The seed is Christ, and those who are His through the travail of His soul, according to Isaiah 53 — "He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (v.10). But Satan is against that, against Him and that seed. Well, we see what Athaliah stands for quite clearly.

The seed royal

And we see what the seed royal represents, that line in relation to the Lord for His testimony through history right up to the end, a seed royal. "Ye are ... a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). "They shall be mine, says Jehovah of hosts, even mine own possession, in that day" (Mal. 3:17). Well, the seed royal are recognised, identified, those who really do stand vitally related to the Lord's testimony, which is at last to be found in exaltation in the throne.

But then there is Joash here, Joash the child, rescued, preserved, and the simple details about Joash are significant and helpful; Joash, with whom the testimony is linked and bound up. We might say very truly that

the testimony exists very largely with Joash, the young king, but he is very small in this day. The power here in this world, the reign on this earth, is an immense thing, a mighty thing, a far-reaching thing. The Holy Spirit caused the record to include this phrase — “Athaliah reigned over all the land”, this iniquitous thing against the Lord and His anointed, having great power indeed, far-reaching influence, seeming to possess the throne and the dominion. And, on the other hand, that which represents the Lord’s interests, the Lord’s testimony, is very small, very weak, and what is more, it is very hidden, and what is more still, it is hidden in the house of God. Even Israel did not know of the existence of Joash. A very few knew that he was alive and where he was. I think we will all draw the significance of that at once. It does not need enlarging upon. We know that that which represents the Lord’s real full interest, that which is the seed royal in the spiritual sense, that with which the testimony of the Lord is really bound up is a very small thing and a very hidden thing, and a thing unrecognised by a great mass of people who bear the Lord’s Name and are called the Lord’s people. Even they do not know, do not recognise, but the Lord has His testimony hidden in His house.

The priesthood

But then there arise some other things here. That which takes responsibility for the testimony or the vessel and instrument of the testimony, is the priesthood. It is the high priest who assumes responsibility for Joash, that is for the preservation of what is of the Lord in truth, in purity, and again the intimation and lesson is very simple. We need not think about priests and priesthood and priestly ministry as related to certain people of a certain class, order and ordination. We have only got to see what work priests do and then we can decide who the priests are, and if you and I, no matter how weak, ignorant or despised we may be, are really doing what Jehoiada did, then we are priests, and priests of tremendous value and significance to God. For priesthood is shown by its ministry and not by its caste, by its effect and not by its office, and priesthood is just this, that it takes serious and solemn responsibility for God’s testimony in purity. Are you a priest? Am I a priest? It has ceased to be an official matter; it is now a spiritual matter. True priests unto God are those who, like Jehoiada, step forward in a day when the people of God are spiritually estranged, in spiritual uncleanness, shall we say, contamination, when the influence of Jezebel and Athaliah is very

strong, even over the people of God. They have been brought into alliance with this world. Priesthood is that which steps forward and takes solemn responsibility for the thing which is of God in purity and in truth, though it be small and hidden, though it may not be recognised by many, nevertheless priesthood stands for that. It is not easy at all, to stand for something that is not recognised and not known, something which the majority, even of those who are called the Lord's people, know nothing about and cannot see or appreciate. In a day when another order is in the ascendancy, holds sway and something that is really against the true testimony of God and has the power among the Lord's people, it is not easy to stand true and faithful for what you know to be God's thought. But priesthood does that. If He has made us priests unto Himself, let us remember that that means He has bound up with us the solemn responsibility of His testimony. It is that which constitutes us priests. Priesthood always had to do with God's testimony in purity.

The greatest charge that ever the Lord had to level against Israel was with regard to their priests. Their priests were defiled, they no longer ministered in purity, and when the priesthood became defiled, we know that the nation also became defiled. So it was in the days of Eli when his sons the priests fulfilled their ministry in a corrupt way. Well, we ask ourselves, Are we priests? Priesthood is something which takes us right on to the innermost things of the Lord's heart — always remember that — and that in a day when the general situation is one very different from that desire of the Lord. Jehoiada knew quite well what he was up against. He knew the days in which he lived, he knew the perils that he ran. Nevertheless, here you have a courageous and militant priest, who is jealous for the Lord's testimony, even though it be represented by something very small.

That is the priesthood precious to God; this is a priesthood necessary to the Lord in a time of crisis, and shall we not say that this is such a time? Indeed it is! Priesthood girded for the preservation of what is wholly of the Lord.

Priesthood and sonship

It is very interesting to note how, right through the Scripture, the Old Testament in type, in the New Testament in direct teaching, priesthood and sonship always go together. The priests, the *sons* of Aaron. Now it says here, "the king's son". Jehoiada and the king's son are found

together. When you get into the New Testament, especially in the letter to the Hebrews, you find that sonship and priesthood are tremendously linked together, "... has at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son" (Heb. 1:2). Then there is all that about His Son, and then the sons — "bringing many sons to glory", and then, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord". Sonship! And then, alongside that, all that there is in that letter about priesthood. We know that priesthood is something which has to do with the innermost things of the Lord's heart, and we also know that sonship represents that maturity which can take responsibility as being something more than a child, a son taking responsibility.

What is maturity? Let me say to the youngest believer, the youngest Christian, that you do not have to wait until you get to thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years old before you reach spiritual maturity, before you come to sonship. I believe that Samuel had attained sonship when first we read of him as ministering in the house of God. He was head and shoulders above Eli spiritually. He was above every other man in the land spiritually, as a youth. What is spiritual maturity or sonship? It is that energy of the Spirit which takes responsibility for God's fullest interests, and has no compromise with that which is at work against those interests of God to subvert the Lord's testimony. Jealousy for the full testimony of the Lord — that is a mark of sonship, maturity, as it is a mark of priesthood.

Priesthood and the throne

Then there is this other truth which shines out in the Word, that priesthood and sonship are always bound up with the throne, so that we are not only priests but a kingdom and priests, or kings and priests, if you like. The Lord Jesus is King, and He is Priest. He has called us and chosen us to be priests and kings, but this is spiritual. It simply means the testimony is our jealous concern. We take responsibility for it to see that it comes to the throne, to ascendancy, and when it is there, we are found there also in that place of spiritual government.

Well, what have we got? First, Athaliah, a great, powerful, far-reaching order of spiritual influence which is working against the pure full testimony of the Lord. Second, the seed royal, small, weak, hidden, antagonized. Third, priesthood which takes responsibility for that small and hidden thing which is so precious to the Lord.

The day of the showing

What next? The day of the showing! At length the day comes when the king is brought out and presented and acclaimed — the showing of the testimony or the vessel of the testimony in God's own time, and really all the trouble in the world is waiting for that. Paul has told us so clearly that it is the explanation of the travail of the whole creation — waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. In due course, that which has been small, nursed, protected in secret, hidden, so largely unknown, is brought out by the Lord and by the priest. It comes to challenge the Lord's people, God's spiritual Israel as to where they stand, and in God's time when the false reign has been such an evil thing as to create a state among the Lord's people which they feel almost impossible to endure, when within them there has been produced, by the very conditions of that evil reign an inward revolt and a longing for something more, then the Lord has got that something more ready. He has been keeping it secret, hidden, preserved, protected unto His own time, and when the hour is ripe and He brings it forth, the people say in effect, This is what we want! This is what we need! Long live the king!

Are we to expect anything like that, or is not that the very thing for which we are holding on in our priestly work? This gets us right to the heart and point of everything. There is today a false system of power and influence, even over the Lord's people in a general way, and if you were to bring to the mass of Christian people today the full thought of God, the testimony of Jesus, they would not have it. They will not have it. The fact is, and it is not a pleasant thing to say at all, but the fact is that the antagonists of God's thought are Christians, not the world. It is the Christian church of today as it is in its present system, which opposes what is God's deepest and fullest will. You never know how terrible the power of that Christian system is until you get up against it. You find it is a terrible thing, and Athaliah — that is, the link between the Lord's people and this world, and this world system — has terrible, awful power over the people of God, and the further fact is this, that the people of God are not ready for anything more. Very largely, they are content, satisfied, not ready for anything more. That is not a pleasant thing to say, but it is true. Go to the Lord's people with a full message and you find that they do not want it. They regard it as something they can take or leave, and we know when you are in that state, we are like spoilt children; when we can say, when something is offered to us, I don't want it, that means that we are in no

desperation. So the Lord allows Athaliah to go on, but Athaliah's reign will, under His sovereignty, produce among the Lord's people more generally a growing sense of dissatisfaction, disappointment, and a deepening sense that things are not right, there is something other. If there is not, then everything is a disappointment, a failure. There must be something more! And the sovereignty of God allows the false reign to produce that, and then, in His own time when the need is felt, the way is prepared, He has had in secret, in keeping, guarded, that which is to come out and to which there will be a response by a large number of His people. I trust that this is not wishful thinking, that I am not reading into this story what we hope will be the case, but it does seem to me that this is how the Lord has worked and does work, and in His own time out from the secret, when things are ready, He brings that which He has got to which there will be a response.

Whether that is going to be so generally or not, we have yet to see, but you cannot get away from this, that it is happening all the time in certain cases. You have been jealous for the Lord's testimony in its greater fulness, but you know quite well that it is not going to be generally accepted, and so you have to fulfil your priestly ministry in faithfulness very largely in secret and there seems to be no way for it generally and it is a very trying time. But the Lord is working here and there among His people creating disappointment and dissatisfaction and a sense of need. And then, in His time, if you are led by Him, if you are in the hands of the Spirit, He will lead you out in that direction and He knows that there will be a response in certain places. He has been preparing and He knows the moment in which there will be a response, in this direction or that direction, to that which He has been keeping and guarding in secret, for which you have been watching in your priestly ministry. That is a very comforting fact. The Lord knows where there are prepared ones. To be led of the Spirit means to be led in that direction, and while at large the people may not be ready or able to accept your ministry and it may be even dangerous to talk to them about these things, only to stir up more antagonism. But being led of the Spirit, He knows where there will be a response, and when He brings that moment in and that contact, at once there is a jubilant cry in the spirit of this — Long live the king! We have got what we want! This is the thing for which we have been longing! That is a blessed day when that comes about and He is doing it. So we do not have to wait for some day when the thing will be general. Let us fulfil our ministry and we shall discover that in faithfulness in priestly ministry to

the Lord's full testimony, and being led of the Spirit under the anointing, from time to time here and there a contact will be made, and those with whom the contact is made will say, This is what I have been looking for, waiting for! You have got the thing I need! There is nothing more blessed than that. So let us be faithful.

We cannot close without one more terrible and yet joyous contemplation. The day comes when Athaliah will be destroyed. It is a terrible day, but it is coming. "Yet once again, says the Lord, I will shake not the earth only but the heavens ... and the desire of all nations shall come" (Hag. 2:6-7). God is going to shake the Athaliah system out of His people and bring in the desire of all. Well, Athaliah will be destroyed eventually, and God's King will be on the throne. God's testimony will be in the place of universal power and be something very much better than even Joash. The reign of Joash was a very feeble reflection of the great truth which he illustrates. But still, he points on to the day when Athaliah and all that Athaliah represents, Jezebel and that whole evil tendency and influence will be broken. Then He shall reign alone whose right it is and if we suffer with Him we shall reign with Him. The Lord keep us faithful, then, in our priestly ministry!

HOLINESS

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-11.

In this passage, if the text were printed in the Hebrew form, that is, translated according to the Hebrew emphasis, various words would be thrown up in clear relief, and they would be in Isaiah 6 the following words or phrases: ‘throne’ (6:1), ‘temple’ (6:1), ‘woe’ (6:5), ‘altar’ (6:6), ‘go’ (6:9), and ‘how long’ (6:11).

So there are six leading words or phrases in this passage, and these give you very largely the key to its message. What is clearly represented by this chapter is that the whole question is that of *holiness*. Everything else is included in that. This is not first of all, as has so often been stressed, a message about service. Service is there, but it is not the main thing. Worship is there, and this passage has been very often used, and is constantly used, as something for public worship, to introduce the element of worship. But worship, like service, is not the primary thing; it is also conditional, contingent. There are several things here in this portion which could be dealt with as things in themselves, but everything is included in one thing, and that is *holiness*.

God’s judgement

It relates to Israel’s condition to begin with. As you see, the chapter brings that in, and the chapter itself is set within that realm with regard to Israel and then with regard to the nations beyond. It is a question of holiness. The Lord, in taking account of things, in raising up this prophet, does so because of an unholy state which has made necessary the determination to judge, and has brought into view for a time the closing of those mercies of God, and for a period the casting off of His people, though He will not cast off for ever. Captivity is in view, judgement is in view, and it is all a matter of holiness. The terrible issue of this chapter is that what the people have been doing themselves spiritually, is now fixed by the Lord. They have been closing their eyes; now the Lord fixes that state. They have been closing their ears; the Lord takes action; they have been hardening their

hearts; the Lord hardens; they have been living for themselves; the Lord hands them over to themselves. So the judgement fixed is by reason of an unholy state, and everything has to do with holiness.

God's call

Then so far as the prophet is concerned. First of all there is his call. He is brought in, and his call carries with it the necessity for separation. You notice that immediately the question of holiness is raised the prophet becomes conscious of being involved in the whole state: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). He is conscious, as he was never conscious before, of his being involved in a state utterly opposed to God, and his call necessitates complete separation from that state of unholiness. And then his commission necessitates his cleansing. Notice, he is going to be the mouthpiece of the Lord in judgement. He is going, in effect, to fix the state of this people from the divine side. He is saying: 'You have closed your eyes, then you shall not see if you want to. You have closed your ears, then you shall not hear, even if you want to hear. You have hardened your heart, then you will not be able to turn your heart to the Lord, even when you want to. You have lived for yourselves; very well, the Lord hands you over, and the Lord will not accept you, even when you turn to Him.' Now, nobody can take action of that kind and at the same time be involved in the condition. You and I, if we are going to preach, to testify, must be altogether outside of the condition against which we are testifying, or else we are testifying against ourselves. So that this man, in order to fulfil his commission, must be separated and cleansed from the condition against which he is to testify, and he must not become involved in the judgements which he is to declare. So that holiness governs everything here. It is the thing which governs the judgement of God. It is the question of holiness that produces judgement. It is also the thing which governs the call of God and the commission of God. Holiness is basic, and the background to everything in the divine activities. God's judgement against sinners, and His methods with His servants; everything is directed by holiness.

God's throne

Then there is this other thing. The throne, which is the throne of infinite holiness, and the majesty of that throne, is based upon holiness.

The very majesty of the Lord is the majesty of His holiness. He is in that position as here represented, because of holiness, we must remember that in passages like this in Isaiah and elsewhere, the throne is not just the throne of Infinite, Almighty, Eternal God. That is, it is not the throne of the Almighty One alone. It is that, but that is not the feature of the throne in this portion, and in others. It is the throne of holiness, but that holiness is by reason of something having been done. It is comparable with Philippians 2:9: "Wherefore God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the Name which is above every name". It is comparable with the Hebrew letter: "We see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9), because of the suffering of death. Something has been done in relation to sin which establishes that throne in holiness, and gives to that throne the right to judge sin. It is not just the judgement of men as creatures, under the hand of an Almighty God. It is the judgement of a sinful state under a holy state. There is all the difference between a potentate upon his throne, governing in sheer majesty because of his superior position, and One who, because of something which has been done in relation to sin, being established in holiness, dealing with an unholy state. It is very important to see that.

The Lamb's worthiness

I want to point out the difference which is marked in the two chapters in the Book of the Revelation by this very law, that first of all you have a song in heaven: "Worthy art thou, O Lord ... for thou didst create all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Then the next chapter brings in a new scene, and there is presented the sealed book. And this is not the book of grace, this is the sealed book of judgement. The apostle says that he looked to see who would unlock the book, open the seals, but there was no one found who could unlock those seals and open that book of judgement. And he says: "I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book ... and one of the elders said unto me, 'Weep not: behold; the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah ... has overcome to open the book' ... and I saw ... a Lamb ..." (Rev. 5:4-6). And then another song is heard immediately: "Worthy art thou ... to open the seals thereof: for thou ... didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The first "Worthy art thou" is on the basis of creation, but that was not a sufficient worthiness to unlock the seals of judgement, because

judgement is not merely upon the basis of creation. Judgement is upon the basis of redemption. Our attitude is not towards the Creator, but towards the Redeemer: not towards God in His creative power, but towards God in His redemptive work. Judgement is upon that. We shall never be judged by God simply because we did not recognise Him as Creator. The judgement will be because men did not recognise His redemption. So that the Lamb comes in with a superior worthiness to creation, because of redemption.

The throne and the altar

That is what is here. It is holiness that governs. The throne comes in as the throne of holiness. But note: in relation to this unholiness in which the prophet is involved, from which he has to be separated in order to be God's instrument, the throne does not, even in its holiness, directly operate. It operates through the altar. There is the throne; there is the altar. The throne does not directly deal with him; the throne comes to him through the altar. The throne always works through the cross. That infinite holiness can only be made good in us through the cross, the blood of His cross. There is no gift of holiness, there is no cleansing, there is no deliverance, there is no separation, there is no commission, only on the ground of the making active and experimental in our own hearts of the work of His cross. The throne, in all its wonderful power, moves by way of the altar. The throne brings in a terrible consciousness of conviction of unholiness, and brings from the heart a cry, but the throne cannot in that direct way deliver us. It can only condemn us, make us aware that there is a holiness before which we cannot stand. How shall we live before such a throne? How can we be delivered from death in the presence of that infinite holiness, and the impact of that holiness upon our sinful state? By being led to the altar, by being brought to the precious blood, and when the cry is wrung from the heart concerning an unholy state, which carries with it a cry to be delivered therefrom, "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 touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isa. 6:6-7). Then everything else follows, the way is open for all else in the way of commission and authority.

The point is, when all has been said, that everything hangs upon the holiness which is produced by a living application of the cross to our

hearts in the power of that throne; the power of that holiness operating through the cross of the Lord Jesus in our hearts. Whatever may be the state, whether it be general or particular in the case of Isaiah it seems that he focused the whole question upon what is implied by “unclean lips”. He did not mean that he and his people were guilty of language which was not right. What is meant in the Scriptures by “unclean lips” is that things were said with the lips which were not true in the heart, a false profession of allegiance or faithfulness to God. Yet they said: “Wherein have we robbed Thee?” (Mal. 3:8). All the time professing to be the Lord’s, professing and declaring themselves, and yet contradicting in their hearts. So that the lips were unclean by reason of a life which contradicted the thing. It was a lie. What they were saying was not the truth in their own hearts.

That was Israel’s state. It was not that they were outwardly, voluntarily, manifestly blaspheming the Lord, declaring that they would have nothing to do with Him, but they were keeping up the old system and professing to be what they were not. That is, they were uttering a lie, and their lips were defiled.

Ministry and holiness

It may be specific in our case. Lips may in that general sense be defiled, unclean. They may be in a more specific sense unclean. We can never fulfil a ministry of holiness, never bring home to others their sin, never be a voice of judgement against wrong if in either general or specific ways our lips are unclean. Lips may be unclean by empty talk, gossip, criticism; not intentionally — for who would intentionally injure the Lord’s interests — but just letting ourselves talk. And in the end there is mischief, there is a seed sown unintentionally that bears a crop.

It may be lips, it may be other things, but with the Lord it is all a question of holiness. It is not our thought to deal with specific sins, but it is our leading just to point out this matter of holiness, which is basic to everything. Holiness has to work out in every part. We can be unclean by what we allow ourselves to listen to. Sometimes it would be the maintaining of holiness before the Lord for us to say, I do not want to hear that, that is not good, that is not glorifying to the Lord, we are not going to get anywhere by that, it is only death and injury along that line.

It may be eyes. Sometimes the question of holiness is bound up with our refusing to take account of some things. There are many things that in responsibility we have to take account of, but there are times when we

could afford to shut our minds to some things because they are only going to lead to an unholy state. It is all a question of holiness, because holiness is life. Leviticus 16 says with that object: "... that he die not" (Lev. 16:2,13). This all relates to Aaron going into the most holy place and not dying before the presence of infinite holiness, having on the garments of holiness, and taking the precious blood. All the garments are for every part of the man, that his whole flesh be covered up, "that he die not", when he comes into the presence of the Lord. The Lord says, in a full and inclusive way, that there must be life in everything, in all work, in all service, in all relationships, and it is a question of holiness. If there is talk that is not holy then there is death. If there is listening that is not holy then there is death. If there is taking account in an unholy way, then there is death. Holiness is life; unholiness is always spiritual death. The altar works by reason of the throne, the throne works through the altar.

Christ triumphant

One other word. It is a very blessed thing to realise what these two things do say, the throne and the altar. You have two pictures. That altar is the Lord Jesus, that blood is His blood, that sacrifice is His sacrifice, that live coal is the Holy Spirit working in relation to the work of the Lord Jesus in His cross. And yet at the same time that throne is just as much the Lord Jesus as that cross, that altar and that sacrifice. These are both the Lord Jesus, the two things in Leviticus 16 making one thing. The ram for Azazel — the wilderness, the unknown land, bearing sin, and the ram offered to God and accepted, are really one sacrifice in two halves. One bearing sin and carrying sin away out of God's sight, out of God's remembrance, into an unknown land. At the same time the other side of the offering coming up into God's presence, being accepted, going right through. They represent the two aspects of Christ. One the altar, the cross: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?", forsaking sin. The other side, accepted and in the throne. But the fact that He is in the throne, the fact that you see Christ there, is the great declaration of the fact that that cross was absolutely successful and triumphant, that all that the cross represented was perfect, complete in its result, and that He occupies the throne by reason of the once and for all perfection of the work of His cross, and He never sets that aside. In His throne He says, I witness to that all the time, to the perfection of that. Fellowship with the throne means that we stand absolutely in the completed, perfected work of His cross. Israel was losing

fellowship with the throne because all that that altar represented had not become real in their experience.

You see what the altar does. It declares to us that the thing has been done fully, finally, perfectly, and that there can be fellowship with the throne. It works both ways. Not only does the throne work through the altar to us, but we have perfect fellowship with the throne because of the altar. We are today able to stand in the presence of infinite holiness, because we by faith have recognised the perfection of the work of Christ's cross, where there is no fear, and yet we must recognise that that cross and that precious blood demand that at every point unholiness is put away.