Transformation through Vision

Introduction

In Revelation chapter 1 John describes a vision he had of the Lord Jesus. It was clearly an awesome experience written in deeply symbolic language. John not only describes the vision, but also the effect of the vision. **There is a cause and effect relationship**.

Often we long – corporately and individually – for **"revival"**. But what is revival? Dr Martin Lloyd Jones described it as: *"God passed by"*. Revival is when God in His Sovereignty sweeps away all the deadness and barrenness and gives His people **a new revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.** This is the cause – the effect is revival and a fresh commissioning.
Remember the excitement of the man who found the treasure!

We often build up a mental image of revival. "When revival comes … this or that will happen." We aim for the effect, but we don't discern the underlying cause. We long for a life of joy, of praise, of liberty and of effectiveness, but we fail to understand the root cause of all these effects. The cause is "a fresh vision of God".

We are going to look at **four visions** people had of God. We need to see the Lord as these men saw Him. We will also see **the effect** on their lives. I hope each of us will find parallel effects in our own lives.

Any one vision gives you only a partial picture. Even making a study of the composite of all Biblical visions of God gives an inadequate description of God. We will only really know Him when we "see Him"!

We know 'in part' now. I believe that what the Lord wants to do is to take us much deeper **into what we already know**. This will give us a much **deeper** conviction of sin, **a greater degree of brokenness** than we have experienced before and perhaps with regard to areas of our lives that we have never allowed Jesus to touch before.

So we will look at:

- **Isaiah's vision** (Is. 6) – a vision of the throne and the holiness of God
- **Paul's vision** (Acts 9:1-9) – a vision of the Cross and the crucified life
- **Joshua's vision** (Joshua 5:13-6:5) – a vision of the power of God and the way to victory
- **John's vision** (Rev. 4 and 5) – a vison of the throne and in the midst of the throne a Lamb

Our greatest need is to come to Jesus again and to receive from Him a fresh vision of Himself. So often there is an erosion of our faith and especially of our love for Him. It is the subtlety of Satan that causes us to transfer our love and worship from Jesus Himself to the ministry or the work we do or the organisation we work for. The result is always an erosion of vision.

What is your vision – your ministry, your team, your church? It is a common shared vision that keeps us together like glue. People and teams often lose their vision. So what are we to do? Visions like this are secondary or derived visions. They are the **effect** derived from the **cause**. The primary vision is a fresh vision of God.

1. Isaiah's Vision: A Vision of the Throne and the Holiness of God – Isaiah 6

Here was a man who had a vision of God in a deep and dramatic way. Before the vision:

- His head was battered with questions.
- His heart was bruised with misunderstandings.
- He felt discouraged and beaten.
- He saw little hope for the future.

Satan had shrunk his vision. **Then** he had a vision of God and was never the same again. Despair turned to a sense of victory and triumph. His incapacity turned to ability and effective ministry.

I want you to notice:

I saw (v. 1) – I **said** (v. 5, 8) – **I heard** (v. 8)

We will look at:

- The contrasts Isaiah saw
- The confession Isaiah made
- The cleansing Isaiah experienced
- The commission Isaiah received

<u>The contrasts Isaiah saw</u>

- **A contrast between persons**
  - There was an earthly throne that was empty and a heavenly throne that was holy.
  - It wasn't **the fact** that King Uzziah was dead that struck Isaiah, but **the reason** he had died. [*Uzziah's story is told in 2 Chron. 26. He died in about 740 BC.*]
  - Uzziah was the greatest king since David.
  - He came to the throne as a teenager – 16 years old.
  - From the beginning of his reign, ***"He set himself to seek the Lord"***. (v. 5)
  - He began as a good and God-fearing king and as a result he became a man of power and prestige.
  - This led to prosperity in the nation – increased national boundaries, increased wealth and good harvests.
  - All this was, ***"Because he was marvellously helped"*** by God (v. 15) – ***"<u>Until</u> he was strong"***.
  - Then pride set in.
  - He tried to take the duty of a priest and offer a sacrifice. The priest rebuked the king. The king got angry with the priest and God judged the king.
  - Leprosy broke out all over the king.
  - This man of great potential died an outcast and a leper because of pride and disobedience.

It is a sad and tragic story. Isaiah went into the temple sad, disappointed and despairing. His vision for the expansion of revival in Judah was crushed. He grieved about human failure and felt let down by the people he trusted. No other prophet dates an event by a death, but Isaiah does this twice (also 14:28). The state of the king was symbolic of Isaiah's view of the nation – its plight and its problem. **Then he saw the Lord.**

It is essential that we learn **to look up**.

- If you look inside yourself, you will be disheartened.
- If you look around, you will be disappointed.
- If you look up, you will see God – for Isaiah was allowed to see the Lord (the Sovereign).

So what Isaiah saw was **a contrast between persons**:

- He saw an earthly polluted king who had failed and whose throne was empty.
- He saw a living eternal God who was on His eternal throne, high and exalted, with a robe that filled the temple.
- He saw the angels of heaven continuously worshipping the Living God.
- God was pure and holy in contrast to the foulness of the dead leper king and the empty throne.
- He is the Lord God Almighty – the Lord of Hosts – the God of all power.
- He is **The King**! What Isaiah saw was a picture of **majesty**. God Himself is not described.
- Moses and the priests of Solomon's day retreated in the presence of the Shekinah cloud of the glorious presence of the Lord.

So an earthly throne – dirty and empty – where the glory had departed and a heavenly throne radiant in glory and whose heavenly glory fills the whole earth.

Here are two results of such a vision:

i) **This is not a God to be trifled with.**
We live in an age when talk about God is cheap and irreverent.

ii) **The ultimate authority belongs to God.**
The more we know of God the more unreservedly we will trust Him and the simpler and more childlike will be our faith.

How should this speak to us?

- Be very careful of the leprosy of pride. Aim for a simplicity of faith.
- Give up your small ambitions! Earthly greatness is so pale compared to the splendour of heaven!
- Examine yourself. Are you really seeking **first** the Kingdom of God? Examine yourself as God examines us. Our standard is to be God Himself!

The temple shook and Isaiah was shaken with it. In the light of that awesome majesty and holiness he was humbled and brought down to the dust. He realised with acute consciousness his own deep need of help and deliverance.

So there was a contrast between human and heavenly persons.

➢ **A contrast in worship**

He not only saw a contrast in persons, but a contrast in worship. Isaiah had a glimpse of heavenly worship.

- The seraphs are 'burning ones' (it is a description not a title) and later Isaiah was to experience their burning ministry. The living creatures of Rev. 4:6-9 also have six wings.
- The Seraphim are a marvellous audio/visual aid to true worship.
- They are bright creatures, scintillating with light, radiating glory and power. Yet they take every precaution so nothing detracts from the pure and holy worship of God.
- They have six wings – four to hide with and two to serve. Why do they hide? They are so pure, so beautiful, yet they cover their faces and their feet! By doing this they refuse any intention of choosing their own path. Their intention was only to go where the Lord

ordered. The reason is that only God was seen to be worshipped. They hide so all the glory goes to God.

- In their worship of God they take great care to see that it is pure and perfect – that it is holy and right. The Seraphim were calling to one another, responding in antiphonal song! And the theme of the song was the holiness of the Lord and His presence in all and His glory in every place. In Hebrew, repetition is used to express superlatives. [i.e. 2 Kings 25:15 ***"gold, gold"*** = pure gold]. **Only here** is a **threefold** repetition. For these beings it must reflect their insight into the nature of God. Holiness is the supreme truth about God and His holiness. It is so far beyond human thought that a super superlative must be invented to express it.

  Holiness has as its root 'separatedness'. It is total and unique moral majesty. When people fear God (Judges 6:22; 13:22), it isn't the consciousness of humanity in the presence of divine power, but the consciousness of sin in the presence of moral purity. Isaiah learned that God is ***"the Holy One of Israel"***. He uses this phrase 25 times in the next chapters.

What a contrast with worship in Isaiah's day! Look at Isaiah 1:11-15.

- God took no pleasure in their sacrifices. He didn't want them.
- Their incense was an abomination.
- He hated their religious festivals.
- He refused to hear their prayers.
- **Their worship was third-rate and third-best.** It was shallow and poorly prepared and **it was not acceptable to God**. They were going through the motions, but their hearts were far from God and **God hates play-acting in worship**.

Now what Isaiah saw wasn't put on for Isaiah's benefit. In Rev. 4:8 the apostle John saw the same throne and the same heavenly creatures crying, ***"Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come"***. If we had a vision of heaven now, we would see the same scene, for this worship is going on now. The constant task of the seraphim is to proclaim to one another the holiness and glory of the One on the throne.

God wants us to see what Isaiah saw – that our worship and our great concern has been to display **self** and even to use our service for God to that end. It seems that it was the action of the Seraphim that broke Isaiah. Although they were beautiful, they hid themselves for the One upon the throne was infinitely more so and they were concerned that nothing should distract from the worship of God.

Isaiah saw that his chief concern had been to display himself. His attitude had been, *"I am gifted by God, I have been called by God, I am working for God – so of course others should see **me**, support **me**, admire **me**."* He had no wings to hide himself. This is a terrible sin in the eyes of God. It is a sin of pride and rebellion! Isaiah had been working hard, but not for God – really for himself – for the bonus of status and for the praise of men – secretly enjoying it. This had been his motivating factor. Have we been abusing the grace of God and God's call on our lives in order to display our abilities and gain glory for ourselves? In so doing, we hide the glory of God whom we profess to worship and serve. Is there any way in which our service totally or even partially is self-inspired?

So we see a contrast in worship – an almighty heavenly God in whose presence we are not worthy, whom we are invited to worship. But in response our worship is vain, empty, self- centred and faithless. The glory of God reveals our own sinfulness and failure.

- **A contrast between human and heavenly faithfulness**

One aspect of God's glory is His faithfulness. Isaiah's message was to a faithless people. They were faithless in their home life – faithless in their social life – in their moral life, in their execution of

justice and in their standards of behaviour. So there is a contrast between the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of His people.

How faithful are you? As a spouse – as a parent – in your work – in your Christian witness – in prayer – in giving – in honesty and speech? Do you maintain or degrade other people's reputations?

So a holy, almighty, heavenly God, in whose presence we are not worthy, invites us to worship Him. But so often we find our worship is vain and empty. We are called to follow His faithfulness, but we only match it with our faithlessness. A vision of God's glory reveals to us our sinfulness and failure.

The confession Isaiah made

The natural reaction to the exposure of our sin is:

- **Condone it** – everyone is doing it – it's not a big deal
- **Cover it up** – refuse to admit it – bluff your way out of it
- **Confess it** – the least natural – but the only way God allows

Confession is spiritually good for us. It is psychologically good for us and it is physically good for us (see Ps. 32:1-5).

There are three things to note about Isaiah's confession:

- ✧ He confessed his sinful nature.
- ✧ He confessed his sins.
- ✧ He confessed that his sin was related to his great gift and ability.

➢ **He confessed his sinful nature**

"***Woe is me. I am lost*** (ruined)."

G. K. Chesterton was once asked, *'What is wrong with the world?'* His answer was, *'I am'!*

The word 'ruined' is derived from the word 'to be silenced'. Perhaps what he meant was, *'Woe is me. I am silenced'* – excluded from heaven – unable to join in worship – the silence of death.

So Isaiah confessed the root cause of this problem – himself.

- ✧ He was ruined – silenced – as worthless as the dead.
- ✧ In the first 5 chapters there are many woes for other people.
- ✧ Just in chapter 5 we find:
  - ◦ v.8 ***"Woe to those who want to make everything bigger."*** – GREED
  - ◦ v.11 ***"Woe to those who rise up early in the morning that they may run after strong drink."*** (binge drinking?) – DRUNKENNESS
  - ◦ v.18 ***"Woe to those who draw inequity … as with cart ropes."*** – CYNICISM
  - ◦ v. 20 ***"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil."*** – DISTORTION
  - ◦ v.21 ***"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes."*** – FOOLISHNESS
  - ◦ v. 22 ***"Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine."*** – IDOLATRY

All this is true – lots of woes for others, but no woes for himself. But when he sees the Lord high and lifted up in all His transcendent holiness, he says, ***"Woe is me … for my eyes have seen the King"***.

Isaiah was a preacher. He had been carrying out his prophetic task for years, but with an unbroken, judgmental spirit, condemning others, but never seeing his own state – ruined! He had been working hard for God – very busy in his service – but with no vision of God's holiness. Possibly others

thought Isaiah had the cleanest lips in Jerusalem! In comparison to others, Isaiah was seen as a holy person. But now Isaiah had seen the Lord.

Are you like that? Have you been deceiving yourself? Are you working with a stale vision and a cold heart? Has the work become heavy and ineffective? Are you plodding on wearily not seeing yourself as God sees you, but evaluating yourself on the basis of others?

Look at 'revival' according to Isaiah 57:15

"I live in a high and holy place,
But also with Him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
In order to <u>revive the spirit of the lowly</u>
And to <u>revive the heart of the contrite</u>."

Our work for God can be full of self-deception. We keep trying to consecrate our natural, fallen, ugly, leprous self to God! God doesn't want this! The 'self' is full of wrong motives. The 'self' is at war with God (Rom. 8:7). The 'self' has been condemned to die – at the Cross.

What did Isaiah mean by 'ruined'/'silenced'? I think he saw that all that was in him and all that he had been content and happy with – his gifts, his abilities, his personality etc. were an abomination to the Lord. He was a complete and dead loss! There is an old song:
"It's me, it's me, it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

Isaiah confessed his sinful nature. In our hearts lie the seeds of every known sin.

- **He confessed his sin specifically**

  "I am a man of unclean lips."

It is not enough to say, *"I have sinned"*. You must be specific. Why? Because **specific confession leads to definite forgiveness.** If we confess a particular sin, then we can be sure that God has forgiven that particular sin. So many people are burdened by feelings of guilt. There may be false guilt, but often the reason is that there has not been specific confession matched by specific cleansing and an accompanying assurance of forgiveness.

- **His sin was related to his great ability – to his strong point**

He was a preacher/prophet. His lips were his talent. Yet he says, ***"Because I am a man of unclean lips".***

The lips are the tools of the heart. If his lips were unclean, it was because his heart was unclean. His lips represented his service – his work for God. If there was one part of him he thought he had consecrated to God, it was his lips. Now he knew even his lips were unclean, leprous and unacceptable to God.

He thought, *"My talk is tainted. My language is polluted. My conversations are unclean. Others don't see or understand this. But now I see that God does and now, so do I!"* It isn't what others may think, but what God sees that counts. Isaiah knew that God saw him to be as unclean as Uzziah – a leper in heart and mouth as Uzziah was in body!

There are usually three likely causes (motives) for 'unclean' Christian work:

a. **Self-will**: I make my own plans. I initiate things.
b. **Self-effort**: I try to do God's work by myself. I must do what begins with me.
c. **Self-glory:** a desire for others to think well of us – *'Look, he's doing a great work for God'*.

There is a terrible example of this in the life of Moses. You remember that he was excluded from the 'Promised Land'. Why? The story is given in Numbers chapter 20.

Num. 20:10: ***"Hear now, you rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?"*** What was wrong?

- He adopted the attitude that their murmurings were against him. On a similar occasion (Ex. 6:8) Moses fell on his face before the Lord, but now he lost his temper.

- "Must **we**……." He spoke as if he and Aaron were responsible to bring water out of the rock.
- He acted as if simply speaking to the rock was not enough. He had to **do** something spectacular!

So failing faith led to self-effort and self-will. God spoke to Moses and said, ***"Moses, <u>you</u> have rebelled against My word.*** (Moses was the rebel and not the people.) ***You failed to sanctify Me in the eyes of the people."*** Moses misrepresented God. He is a God of mercy and compassion. He is long-suffering. If Moses had spoken softly to the rock, water would have been freely available. But Moses represented God as a resentful God. So there was a terrible intrusion of **self** into his ministry.

We need to confess that even our very best is marred by sin. At our very best, we are weak, ineffectual and inadequate.

<u>The cleansing Isaiah experienced</u>

"Then one of the seraphs flew …." (by God's command). The initiative is always God's – revealing, excluding, condemning and now choosing to save.

This is a marvellous picture of God's provision. God took something He had already planned and applied it to Isaiah. The temple and the altar are but a shadow of the reality of the Lord Jesus and His sacrificial death on the Cross.

In the Old Testament, 'fire' is not a cleansing agent, but a symbol of the wrath of God – of His unapproachable holiness. The altar was the place of blood sacrifice and spoke of atonement, propitiation and the place of the satisfaction required by God.

Coals of fire were taken inside the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12) when sacrifice was made to atone for sin.

It was only **after** Isaiah confessed that there came God's word of forgiveness. God takes the saving, cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus and touches that part of our life that has been marred and made foul by sin:

- ✧ that word we uttered in thoughtlessness
- ✧ that attitude of pride or impatience
- ✧ that soured relationship
- ✧ that immoral thought
- ✧ that self-assertive action
- ✧ that situation in that area of your life

He cleanses us from **all** sin. Then you hear those words of assurance of sins forgiven from the Lord: ***"Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."*** Isaiah contributes nothing. It is all of God.

There are two ideas here:

i. **Your iniquity**: This is what sin does to us. It defiles us. It makes us filthy and deeply ashamed. It is
a <u>subjective</u> feeling of shame. The cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus takes away the iniquity and makes us whole and pure again – removing the sense of shame.

ii. **Your sin**: This is our offence against God in an <u>objective</u> sense. As far as God is concerned, the sin has been expiated and Isaiah is forgiven.

The Holy Spirit will apply the blood of the Lord Jesus to our unclean lips and to our carnal service. We will never be clean without this cleansing and we can't be any cleaner than this. It goes on cleansing us from all sin. There is absolutely no reason why any of us should be without the assurance of our sins being forgiven. If self intrudes again, go back to the Cross for cleansing again. If, in despair, we say, *"Lord, I've done it again!"* Jesus will reply, *"What have you done again?"* God forgets as well as forgives. There is no record that this has happened before.

<u>The Commission Isaiah received</u> (v. 8)

"<u>Then</u> I heard the voice of the Lord …"

In verse one the Lord was seen afar off. Now Isaiah has been brought near – near enough to hear Him speak. Before Isaiah was 'silenced' – now he is able to speak.

God has a place and a purpose for each of us. He called Isaiah to align himself to the purposes of God and be involved in the plan of God.

Isaiah heard the voice of God only **after** the cleansing and forgiveness. This opened the lines of communication between Isaiah and the Eternal God. If you have seen the Lord of Glory and have been cleansed, then God wants to commission you! It is not for you to make resolutions, goals, objectives and plans for the future. **God is always the initiator.** He requires our submission, ***"Here am I, send me."*** The commission is to submit to His plans, His objectives and His goals.

The key is availability – ready for anything.

What a privilege to be a representative of the Lord Jesus – using Paul's words, ***"We plead with you in Christ's stead."***

As believers, we are to serve our Lord. He has a task for each of us to do for Him. Learning what our special task is for God can be both frustrating and rewarding at the same time – frustrating because the process of learning is rarely straightforward and rewarding because there is nothing in this life more satisfying than knowing we are doing our Father's will.

There is a funny story from Ireland. There was a widow called Anna. She had a friend, who was also a widow, called Eliza. Eliza's only son drowned one night in a storm and Eliza's heart broke. Anna went to comfort her friend. What was she to say? She was going to try. *"Listen Eliza, let's pray. Let's ask God to help us."* They both knelt and Anna prayed. Then she said, *"Now Eliza, you pray and ask God to help you."* Weeping, Eliza replied, *"I can't do it!"* Anna said, *"I'll tell you what, ask Him that, if He is with you in your great trouble, He will stretch out his hand and put it on your head."* Trembling and grief-stricken Eliza prayed, *"Oh God, if you are with me please put your hand on my head."* As she prayed Anna put her hand on Eliza's head. Eliza shouted, *"Glory to God, He has done it. I felt His hand on my head! … (pause) It felt just like your hand Anna."* Anna replied, *"Of course, you don't think God was going to stretch out His hand from way beyond the clouds right down here, when He had me to do it for Him!"*

It's not funny really, for who is going to put their hands on people's heads unless we do? Who is going to comfort them if we don't?

Go … and tell:

- ✧ pray for the sick, the blind and the lame
- ✧ preach to the poor – proclaim the Good News
- ✧ release the captives that are held by demonic power

And God will go with **you**.

So conviction led to confession, which led to cleansing, which led to commitment.

No more let it be my working or my wisdom, love or power, but the life of Jesus <u>only</u> passing through me hour by hour.

Five questions

1. Has the Holy Spirit been convicting you of any specific sin in your life and situation?
2. Does confession to God, and maybe to someone else, need to be made?
3. Will you claim the cleansing blood of the Lord for that particular situation?
4. What commitment – resolve – should be made in response to God's word to you today?
5. Are you going to submit and yield and make yourself available to God and His purposes and plans for the future?

2. Paul's vision: A Vision of the Cross and the Crucified Life – Acts 9:1-9

Introduction

Familiarity tends to breed boredom. This is true of rats in a maze. At the beginning they are eager to find the cheese, but unless you change the maze, they can't be bothered to run down the familiar channels.

The story of Paul's conversion is a very familiar story. So how can we study it without being bored? It is an amazing story! You would think so if it had happened to you. So we are going to look at Paul's vision of the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. This is a story that Paul loved to tell. He tells the story twice more in the book of Acts (ch. 22 and 26) and he refers to it in Romans, Galatians and other places in his letters. Perhaps Paul gives the fullest description of the impact this amazing vision had on him in Philippians. He describes:

- The sort of man he was when he had a vision of the Lord Jesus that day on the road to Damascus — Phil. 3:4-6
- The impact the vision of the Lord Jesus had on him — Phil. 2:5-8
- The results of the vision and how it changed his life — Phil. 3:7-12

A description of the man who met the Lord Jesus

Here was Paul, a young man, perhaps in his early 30s and **smelling of spiritual pride**. He was unconscious of it. It is a characteristic of spiritual pride that we are unconscious of it in ourselves. Spiritual pride is the greatest single hindrance in our Christian life – a **deadening** disease like Hansen's disease. The bacteria destroy the nerves so limbs feel no pain.

What was Paul proud of? Phil. 3:4-6

- **He was proud of his ancestry**
  - v. 5 ***"Circumcised on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew of the Hebrews."***
  - ***"Circumcised"*** — one of God's covenant people — heir to all the promises of God. The Jews referred to all non-Jews as the 'uncircumcised' — ignorant of ***"the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises."***
  - ***"Of the nation of Israel"*** — not a proselyte recently come to faith, but one born into the family of Israel — not one of the impure children of the covenant — the Ishmaelites, the children of Esau or Lot.
  - ***"Of the tribe of Benjamin"*** — the tribe that gave Israel her first king and which, out of all the other 11 tribes, remained faithful to the Davidic Kings of Judah.
  - ***"A Hebrew of the Hebrews"*** — although of the diaspora, his family had not allowed itself to be Hellenised. They had not let slip the law and its requirements of separation from the "ungodly".

Paul was proud that he had been born into a godly, convinced, zealously religious family. **More than that** — he came from Tarsus. Tarsus was the home of a famous school of philosophy — the Stoics. An equivalent today would be, *"I went to Harvard or Cambridge or MIT"* (The three most prestigious universities in the world). **More than that**, Paul was a **Roman** citizen. He was probably born a Roman citizen. What did his father do? Something truly amazing! In the early part of the first century AD you had to **earn** your citizenship by doing something very significant for the Empire. By the third century AD you could purchase citizenship.

So Paul had tremendous privileges of birth and he was deeply proud of all the advantages this gave him. He was **a man going up in the world**!

What about you? Such pride will ruin your ministry. I so often find myself proud! Before I came to faith in Jesus, I was a fervent supporter of the civil rights movement in the States and was passionately against apartheid in South Africa. I hated racists. Two years after my conversion I joined our international organisation and was profoundly shocked to discover that I was a racist! It was evident in little ways:

- Only the English know how to make a proper cup of tea.
- Those Americans butcher the English language and are so uncouth.
- For me culture shock was largely the terrible shock of finding myself so proud of my background and ancestry. This pride was deeply embedded in my heart.

So many times I have had to repent of my pride.

- **He was proud of his orthodoxy**

  "As to the law — a Pharisee"

In Acts 26:5 Paul says of the Pharisees, ***"the strictest party of our religion"***. His overriding concern was to live in conformity to what he believed were God's regulations down to the very smallest details of daily life.

Pharisees have a bad reputation in the western church. The word is synonymous with hypocrite. But the Pharisees **believed** the Word of God and tried to **do everything** they could to obey the law. They were better than the Sadducees (the moderate liberals) who didn't believe in angels or in the resurrection.

Paul was very proud to be a Pharisee and very proud of the credibility he thought that would give him in God's sight. He could have said, *"I am glad that I am not like other men ……."* He was definitely **a man going up in the world**.

What about you? Are you proud of your orthodoxy? I have found myself being proud of my orthodoxy. At times I have found myself proud to be an evangelical holding fast to the inerrant Word of God and despising those Catholics or Copts or Orthodox so bound in the traditions of man. At times I have been proud to belong to our organisation rather than to a wishy-washy humanitarian organisation that has long since lost its cutting edge. We are a radical, innovative, flexible part of the 3rd era of missions. We are going to get the job done! We have the correct missiology!

So I have had to repent of my pride of orthodoxy. I am really glad that I'm an evangelical, but it is all because of God's very wonderful grace to me. It is nothing that I have attained to.

- **He was proud of his zeal/activity**

  "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church"

So firm was Paul's belief that he and he alone was right in his understanding of the way and will of God, that he was zealously active in opposing every apparent challenge to the dignity of his religion. He was no armchair believer. He was really very active and this activity was getting him noticed. He was an up-and-coming young man in the Sanhedrin.

I wonder how often on his journey out to Jerusalem Paul looked in the bag of letters from the chief priests in Jerusalem. *"We highly recommend to you Saul of Tarsus — a man in whom we have the highest confidence, a man of brilliant mind, very courageous and active in his assigned tasks. He will go very far — perhaps even a future Chief Priest …."* And as Paul read he said to himself, "*Yes, yes, yes — that and a lot more!"* He was proud of his activity because it got him noticed. He was **very definitely going up in the world**.

What about you? Are you proud of your activity? Is all you crave for and are motivated by being noticed by others and well thought of? **This is the subtlety of self-deception!**

I find it so in my life. It is so easy to be zealous to get noticed — to go that extra mile in order to get praised. If you are really zealous you might get to be a leader! We need to repent of this!

- **He was proud of his morality**

  "As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless"

This is a staggering attainment! It was so hard to remember all the laws. There were over 640 of them to be obeyed each and every day and then another 70 or more for the Sabbath. Paul not only remembered them all, but also carried them all out every day, year after year, never failing once. This is a truly amazing standard of morality. Paul was incredibly proud of this — surely God would be **really** impressed!

So Paul was proud of his ancestry, his orthodoxy, his zeal/activity and his morality. He was sure that God was immensely impressed with him for everyone else was! I wonder if Paul overheard a mother on a narrow street in Jerusalem say to her son in an awed whisper as Paul walked by, *"Son, when you grow up I want you to be just like that man Saul"*.

Now all Paul did and all that he said was to build up **his righteousness**. A man's righteousness is his most precious possession. We hate to admit that we have been wrong! Job was prepared to give up his possessions, his family and his life, but he was not ready to give up his sense of righteousness! On hearing his 3 friends say, *"Job you must have done something wrong … why don't you repent?"* Job wearies us in chapter after chapter saying, *"I have done nothing wrong."* Job was not prepared to give up his righteousness!

So here was Paul going up to Damascus and **going up in the world**. He was reeking with spiritual pride. He was worshipping the god of achievement — the god of success! What was the vision that he saw?

Paul had a vision of the "Man who came down"

Paul describes the Person he met in Phil 2:5-8. The man who was going up met the Man who came down! Here is Paul's description of the Man who came down:

- **The Man who was in the form of God** ('*morpho'*)

This man possessed **inwardly** and displayed **outwardly** the very nature of God. Can you sense Paul's deep sense of embarrassment and shame? It is a bit like a kindergarten graduate boasting about his attainment to a Nobel prize-winner! But actually, the difference is infinitely greater.

- What was Paul's ancestry compared with the eternal glorious Son of God?
- What was Paul's orthodoxy and commitment to what he perceived as truth compared to the man who **was** Truth – the epitome and essence of truth?
- What was Paul's zeal/activity compared to the One who created all things and sustains all things by the word of His power?
- What was Paul's morality compared to this Man who is holy and pure beyond the conception of man?

- And yet, ***"Although He was in the form of God, He emptied himself"***

He voluntarily gave up His right to be treated as equal with God! A ***"thing to be grasped"*** is a thing to be held on to at any cost — a prize that you must never let slip from your hand. This Man had co-possession with the Father and the Holy Spirit of the eternal divine glory. This man had something so much greater than anything that Paul could ever hope to attain. Yet Jesus chose self-emptying, self-humbling and self-denial! He chose to come **down** — so very far down — so as to become a human being — a man! In His own personal and essential nature He who was God, emptied Himself. '*Kenoo* '(Greek 'to empty' used here) means 'to deprive something of its proper place and use'.

Calvin said, *"Christ could not divest himself of the Godhead, but He kept it concealed for a time. He laid aside His glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it."*

It was the voluntary deprivation of the exercise of Lordship — a veiling of His glory. Charles Wesley writes in one of his famous hymns, **"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see"**.

- **Into what did He empty Himself?**

Jesus brought the whole of His divine nature – undiminished – and poured it into … a slave! *Doulos* — a slave — 'the servant of the Lord' of those great passages in Isaiah. It doesn't say a *'diakanoi'* — a sort of respectful servant, but one of the *'douloi'*. Jesus became **a slave** — a position that is totally unacceptable today, with no wages, no right to strike, no union, no human rights at all — merely a possession, a chattel to be bought and sold.

Jesus was really human ***"… born in the likeness of men"***. This **Man who came down** didn't use His eternal glory — His both by nature and by right — as a launching pad for self-display or for self-advancement. But He came down so very low! He became human!

- born in a humble peasant home
- grew up in a poor menial home in a despised village in the backwater of a minor Roman province
- He became a slave — a NOBODY

So this Man gave up the right to be treated as God.

- **The Man who gave up His right to life and died accursed**

"Low within a manger lies He who built the starry skies."

Wasn't this low enough? No! Jesus chose to take upon Himself the one thing that had absolutely no power over him — death! ***"He was obedient right up to the point of death."***

Death can be honourable — on the battlefield — even in bed, but there is no honour in death on a cross! ***"Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree!"*** (Gal. 3:13) So Jesus came down to the lowest place of all. He gave up His right to retain His righteousness! He surrendered a person's most prized possession of all — His righteousness. **Jesus became sin for us — He who knew no sin.** There can never be anything so absolutely awful before or again in history. Even the Father turned His face away! ***"He was numbered with the transgressors."***

"Though He was rich, so rich,
Yet for our sakes how poor He became
Even His garments they parted,
When He hung on the Cross of shame.
All that He had He gave for me,
That I may be rich through eternity."

Jesus was the **first** and **only consenting perfect sacrifice** in history. In the Old Testament there was a transference of sin and guilt to an innocent animal. The animal stood in my place and bore my sin in its death. But the substitution was incomplete. It was inadequate and not nearly good enough. Why was this so? It was because the central citadel of sin was left unrepresented by an uncomprehending and non-consenting animal.

Only a **perfect Man** could really be my substitute and then only if He took delight in doing the will of God in being my substitute — totally voluntarily. Jesus held nothing back. This perfect man came down! Why? He came because **He loves us and longs to bring us back to the Father**. He longs to bless us, liberate us and spend eternity with us!

So this was **the Man who came down**. He met Paul — **the man who was going up**!

The result of 'the man who was going up in the world' meeting 'the Man who came down'
Phil. 3:7-12

Paul was broken! Absolutely undone – ruined, silenced, lost! He looked into the face of divine love and said, ***"Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."***

He utterly rejected all he had thought was important. He counted it as a total loss. His pride was totally smashed. He began to have no confidence at all in himself or in anything about himself.

"Not the labours of my hands can fulfil Thy law's demands.
Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me Saviour or I die."

If we don't have Christ, we have no other hope! Paul said, ***"I counted it as loss the sake of Christ"*** and he lost a very great deal. He dropped out of polite and powerful society. He suffered great deprivation; he lost the skin off his back in a Philippian prison. He was shipwrecked four times. He spent many years in prison. **Yet Paul said that self-righteousness is rubbish as is everything else compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord**. He had found the treasure!

What is brokenness? It is hard to define. It is a willingness to turn back the carpet and expose all the sin we have hidden there. It is confessing to our Heavenly Father **all** our secret sins. It might involve going to people and confessing our sin against them and asking their forgiveness and it might involve restitution if necessary.

Brokenness is best seen as I allow Jesus' attitudes to reign in my life — especially at critical points. We can see Jesus' reactions especially as He approached the Cross and during His Crucifixion. Brokenness (dying to self) is when His reactions become mine.

For example:

The situation	**I remember** **His reaction**	**The result** **my reaction**
When to do the will of God means that even my brothers and sisters don't understand.	Jn. 7:5 ***"Neither did His brethren believe in Him."***	I bow my head, obey and accept quietly the misunderstanding.
When I am misrepresented or **deliberately misinterpreted**.	Jesus was falsely accused, but He ***"Held His peace."***	I bow my head and accept the accusation without trying to justify myself.
When another is preferred before me and I am **deliberately passed over**.	They cried, ***"Away with this Man and release to us Barabbas."*** Lk. 23:18	I bow my head and accept rejection.
When my plans are brushed aside and I see the work of years brought to ruin by the ambition of others.	Jesus allowed them to lead Him away to crucify Him. (Mt. 27:31) He accepted the place of apparent failure.	I bow my head and accept the injustice without bitterness.
When, in order to be right with God, I have to take the humbling path of confession and restitution.	Jesus ***"made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself unto death even death on a cross."*** Phil. 2:8	I bow my head and am ready to accept the shame of exposure.
When others take unfair advantage of me being a believer and treat my things as public property.	***"They stripped Him and parted His garments casting lots."*** Mt. 27:28,35	I bow my head and ***"accept joyfully the spoiling of my goods"*** for His sake. Heb. 10:34

When someone acts towards me in an unforgivable way.	When Jesus was crucified, He prayed, "***Father forgive them for they know not what they do."*** Lk. 23:34	I bow my head and accept any behaviour towards me as permitted by my loving Father.
When people expect the impossible from me — more than time or human strength can give.	I remember that Jesus said, ***"This is My body given for you."*** 1 Cor. 11:24	I repent of self-indulgence and lack of self-giving for others and go the second and third mile etc.

So brokenness is allowing our reactions to conform to how Jesus reacted. We need the help of the Holy Spirit in this. If we are willing, He will empower us to react as the Lord Jesus.

The Gains in joining 'the Man who came down'

Paul mentions four gains he really valued:

- **He was satisfied to be found in Him.**

Paul grew in his knowledge of the Lord Jesus over the years. How little he knew on the road to Damascus! But how much he learned as the years went by. The more he got to know of the fullness and the wealth of that knowledge of Jesus, the more he wanted to know. I think the word that comes through is 'satisfaction'. Everything is worth losing for this pearl of great price. Paul longs to gain more and more knowledge of, ***"Christ Jesus, my Lord"***. This is now his driving motivation. This is now his consuming ambition. Jesus is his home and it is so attractive that he can't be away from home! **Paul wants to be with this Man who came down**. Jesus is his permanent address. He may be in Philippi or Malta or Rome or on a ship on the Mediterranean. He may be healthy or sick or worried, but he is **always '**in Him'. Jesus is the passion of his life.

- **Satisfied to be blessed by 'the Man who came down' by receiving from Him a very precious treasure — righteousness — the righteousness of Christ.**

Paul abandoned totally and forever a 'do-it-yourself' righteousness based on self-effort and on a righteousness that is self-confirmed. Such a form of righteousness is no better than a filthy rag.

[Behold Him there! The Risen Lamb! My perfect, spotless righteousness.]

Jesus is the full expression of the righteousness of God. The words and works of Jesus — His inner character and outer deeds — the works He accomplished, His relationships, His attitudes, His obedience to God — completeness of all He is, all He taught and all He did — in word — everything that could ever be seen in Him — everything that could be said about Him or sought from Him is **absolutely the full righteousness that pleases the Father**. The Lord Jesus is the sum total of all the Father would ever ask. He **is** the righteousness of God.

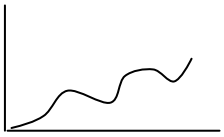
Now the package is: our sins were laid on Jesus and His righteousness is credited to us. He has done it all. Now He is in the midst of the throne and He is our righteousness — our guarantee of acceptance, of access, of everything else — our Father's pleasure, love, grace and power. Nothing can affect my 'righteousness', for He is in the place of the highest authority — in the midst of the throne. This gift of righteousness will never be taken away and it guarantees my present and future acceptance.

- **Satisfied to be made like Him**

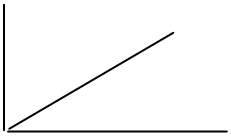
"Becoming like him in his death, that (if possible) I may attain the resurrection from the dead"

Being Christ-like will lead you to the Cross. You follow in the footsteps of 'the Man who came down' to Calvary and to death. But this is also the path to resurrection. **So the way down is the <u>only way</u> up**. Death is followed by resurrection.

The Christian life is often described as 'an up-and-down life' with gradual improvement — i.e. more 'ups' than 'downs'.



The up-and-down life



Steady growth

The aim is for a life of steady growth — i.e. to eliminate the 'downs'. There is a measure of truth in this, but how do you eliminate the 'downs'? Paul tells us it is by living the **down-and-up life.**

- Down at the Cross — up in resurrection power
- Down in repentance — up in joy and thanksgiving and power
- Down in humility and brokenness — up in the Holy Spirit's anointing
- Down at Calvary — up in Ascension and Pentecost!

Paul found great satisfaction in being found **in Him**. He was blessed **by Him** and he found that extremely satisfying. He was satisfied to be made like Him.

- **Paul was satisfied to satisfy 'the Man who came down'**

"I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

Paul is saying Christ Jesus has made me His own. He owns all of us. We belong to Him. What did He have in mind when He took hold of you? Ultimately it is that we grow into His likeness. But God has already decided on the good works by which we will serve Him.

For me it is:

- the growth of the Kingdom in the Arab World
- the Lord's 'Well done!'
- the crown of righteousness that the Lord will give me on **that day**
- the unfading crown of glory — the gift of the Chief Shepherd
- having His name written on my forehead
- having the blood-cleansed robes and, above all, the unending presence of my Lord Jesus

"No eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

So the man going up in the world, driven by pride and an ambition to promote self, met 'the Man who came down'. He was broken by this experience and joined 'the Man who came down' on the path down. But he found this was the path up — up to a life of satisfaction – satisfied to satisfy 'the Man who came down' — to please Him. The smile on His face is all that counts!

Have you wanted to be 'the person going up in the world'? Please have a fresh revelation of yourself and of 'the Man who came down' to the Cross because He loves you. Throw away your shabby, filthy, silly self-righteousness and join Jesus on the way down — which is, in fact, the only way up!

3. Joshua's vision: The Captain of the Hosts of the Lord — Joshua 5:13-6:5

Introduction

The People of God had spent 40 years in the desert. The unbelieving generation had died and Joshua was leading a new generation into the land promised by God to Abraham. The people had crossed over the Jordan by the miraculous power of God. Manna was no longer being provided.

> ***"They did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."*** Josh. 5:12

They had begun to realise in experience the fullness of God's provision. They had begun to enjoy an overcoming life through God's power. They had finished with the desert life of unbelief.

But now they were faced with Jericho — a heavily fortified city. It seemed impregnable. Yet it couldn't be left behind uncaptured. Jericho is near the mouth of the River Jordan as it goes into the Dead Sea (which is far below sea level). Jericho controlled one of the major routes from Moab into the hill country. There is a riverbed (today called Wadi Qelt) coming down from the hills around Jerusalem. In those days riverbeds were the equivalent of highways today.

The Hebrew invasion most probably took place in the late 14th century BC. There is a spring called Ain-es-Sultan in the ancient ruins (see Elisha). The city is about 10 km west of the Jordan.

This was the first of many cities to be taken and many enemies to be defeated. By now Joshua is 80 years old. Yet he needs to respond to the Lord in a new way.

Joshua's Problem: How to overcome the city

Are you facing the challenge of a large city? Joshua, as a good military commander, went to study the situation for himself. Perhaps he went to worry by himself. He didn't want others to know of his anxiety. Gilgal is about 30 minutes' walk from Jericho. Joshua felt the burden of responsibility. He knew and was experienced in desert warfare, but he had no experience in siege warfare. The walls of Jericho about 1400 BC were indeed formidable. The outer wall was 2 m thick. There was a gap (a killing zone) and then an inner wall about 4 m thick. Both walls were about 10 m high.

In Joshua's day the population was about 20,000 and the city was very strategically placed. It would have taken about an hour to walk around the walls (out of bow shot). The city was 7-10 acres in size. So Joshua was wondering about many details. How many scaling ladders would be needed? How do you dig tunnels in the hard rocky soil? How do you breach those walls? How many battering rams will it take to push over those mighty gates? He realised that his resources were inadequate and he was inadequate in his experience. His men were inexperienced in this type of warfare and time was not on their side.

Our problem

Is your way being blocked by a Jericho — a huge obstacle that you have neither resources nor time to overcome? Is there a fortified city that blocks your progress in entering into all the blessings and promises of God for you?

Possible problems include:

- walls of fear, of lust, of selfishness — habits of indiscipline
- opposition from the world — from your family and friends
- frustration with your leader for not allowing you to do what you would like to do
- deep problems in personal relationships
- culture shock, language learning and team life
- loneliness
- loved ones who are withstanding the Lord's grace
- inner inadequacies and failure — some weakness of temperament

Most of us know that there is a weak spot in our makeup. We begin to understand this in our adolescence, but by the time we are adults it has already conquered us many times! Then maybe our Jericho is the impossible task — reaching the Muslim World. There it stands — baffling us, mocking us.

So there are Jericho's of:

- ✧ sin
- ✧ indifference
- ✧ materialism
- ✧ false religion

How do we tackle our Jerichos? We feel the responsibility. We weigh up our resources and wisdom and strength. Even when we remember how the Lord has helped and rescued us in the past, we feel very inadequate. Past victories are no comfort **now** in front of **this** Jericho!

So we struggle with strategies and plans and we worry about money, resources and manpower. And **we are defeated before we begin**. It is worldly wisdom that makes us develop our strategies and tactics — to train our troops etc. — all on the basis of our inadequate wisdom and resources. Remember, God watched the people of Jericho build those walls. Jericho was no surprise to God!

Joshua's Vision: The Commander

So Joshua was on a reconnaissance of the city hoping he was unseen. As the leader this was his duty. Even when we are fully assured that God is with us, we still have to be rational people using our minds and our training. Not to do this is not lack of faith, but presumption. Suddenly, ***"a man was standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand"***. Probably Joshua was shocked and immediately on the defensive. This is a good test of Joshua's courage — "***Be strong and very courageous".*** Now he put it to the proof! Joshua didn't act rashly and attack him. He asked him, ***"Are you for us or for our adversaries?"***

The answer:

"No, I am not on your side, nor am I on theirs. The question is: ***are <u>you</u> on <u>my</u> side?*** *I am the Captain/Commander (not only of your little army Joshua) but of the infinite and almighty power of the Hosts of the Lord. Now* ***I*** *have come!"* God appeared to Joshua as a Man of War.

Joshua was in the presence of the Living God — a theophany is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God. Jesus appeared in the Old Testament several times. This is one of them. Joshua fell on his face and worshipped Him and this worship was accepted. Joshua was ordered to take off his shoes to confirm to him he was indeed in the presence of the Living God. [The same command was given to Moses 40 years before.] Joshua obeyed immediately.

We need to have this same vision of the Lord Jesus. See Rev. 19:11-16 and Ps. 45:3-5 for a picture of the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord. He is given four names in Revelation.

- ➢ **Faithful and True** — a combination of absolute reliability and reality. He is 'the Man at God's right-hand' whom God has made strong for Himself. (Ps. 80:17)
- ➢ **He has a name known only to Himself**. No one understands the Son except the Father. (Mt. 11:27) Jesus, in His person and in His relationship with the Father, is infinitely unfathomable by our finite minds. This is an emphasis on His deity, while the first name is an emphasis on His humanity.
- ➢ **He is the Word of God.** Jesus is the one through whom all creation came into existence (Jn. 1:1-4) and in Whom it continues to exist. All God does, He does by speaking — this is the instrument by which He exerts His energy — His will (Ps. 33:9). New birth is effected by God speaking. (1 Pet. 1:23) Angels too are empowered by the Word of God. (Ps. 103:20) All the enemies of God are destroyed by ***"The sharp sword that proceeds out of his mouth"***. (Rev. 19:15,21)

- His full title is **King of Kings and Lord of Lords**. He is the Supreme Sovereign of heaven and earth. In history there have been many times when to declare this was treason and a capital offence. ***"No one can say Jesus is Lord except in*** (the energy of) ***the Holy Spirit."*** (1 Cor. 12:3)

Also, in Rev. 19 the hosts of heaven are identified as the warriors of God — great angelic armies. **The Lord of Hosts** is used 280 times in Scripture. These angelic armies are usually invisible to our eyes. They have surrounded the throne of God since before time and they are ready to obey the Commander and conduct operations in the heavenly places against all Satanic foes.

In several places we read that 'the Hosts' were seen:

- Jacob saw them.
- Elisha's servant saw them when the army of Syria trapped Elisha.

Never dismiss the great cosmic war going on between the spiritual forces of evil that control the world and the spiritual forces of God who **are** triumphing and **will** triumph. ***"I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"*** said the Commander. (Mt. 16:18)

This same Commander — the King of Kings and Lord of Lords — the Lord of Hosts — wants to appear to us, **but in what capacity?** Certainly not as a spectator! *"Lord Jesus, are you on my side. Lord, I really need your help in what I'm planning to do. Please help me to achieve my goal."* No! No! No! The Lord Jesus has no intention of making us better soldiers or even better leaders. When He comes **He comes to take over**. He comes to step into our shoes. The Lord Jesus is the **Commander** and he comes to take over the war! Our choice is either **revival** or **ruin**!

The Commander's message

The message of the Lord of Hosts begins with a 'No'!

- **No Joshua — to your ideas**
  Joshua was thinking and planning as if it was his responsibility — his strategy and tactics that would make the difference if Jericho was to fall. Are you thinking and planning how you are going to reach Cairo — Egypt — the Arab World with the Gospel? Have you set goals and objectives for this year? The Lord wants to say to you. *"No — not your thoughts, your plans, your ideas, your tactics —* ***but Mine"*** — God's plans and God's thoughts.

  Now this is very encouraging. Why? Usually our plans fail because of the **OMF principle** (**O**ne **M**ore **F**actor). There is always one more factor that we didn't know about, but if we had known we would have succeeded. We are limited by our lack of knowledge of the future! God has been thinking and planning about the full evangelisation of all nations and peoples for a very long time. There is no OMF principle with Him! He plans with infinite wisdom and infinite understanding **and** He has the power to control all events!

  God had already been at work in Jericho — in Rahab's life — for months. God knows when it is the time to fight and when it is not the time (compare Ex. 13:17 and Ex. 17:8-9) and He knows how to destroy the enemy.

- **No Joshua — victory doesn't depend on your strength**

  "I am the commander of the Hosts. The city is going to be taken, not by your army but by mine! You will see the immensely powerful, invisible, angelic army of God in action. It is going to be taken My way!"

  Remember what one angel did to the army of Sennacharib — 185,000 were wiped out instantly. Look up the story in Is. 37:36. The Lord Jesus could call on 12 legions of angels. In a Roman legion at full strength there were 6000 soldiers. So 12 legions of angels would be 72,000 angels. If each angel did what that one angel had done, that would wipe out three times the present population of the world — the **unbelievably** great power of God! We need

to have a fresh vision of the sufficiency and competency of God's power to us who believe. We can rely on Him when we are faced with a Jericho.

Imagine **the relief and rest** that came to Joshua's heart and mind. It didn't matter how strong or weak his army was, because **another** army had entered the field and had taken over the war! This is the first reference in the Bible to the 'Lord of Hosts' as the name of God. It comes another 279 times. So to Joshua, in all his ignorance and weakness, the Lord revealed Himself as **the God of all power**.

- **No Joshua — you are not going to get any glory out of this victory.**

  "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it. Why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4:7)

  If Joshua had failed at Jericho, he would probably have lost his leadership, for he knew how fickle God's People could be. He knew how very encouraged the Canaanites would have been and how demoralised his own people would be. The Canaanites would make mincemeat of his people. No wonder he was worried! But if he won — what glory would come to his name!

  Why do you think God asked Joshua's army to march around the city walls 13 times? It was probably so everyone could see how high and how impregnable the walls were. Everyone needed a good opportunity to see that there was no way that they could capture Jericho. Thirteen long looks to convince them that they were no match for those walls.

  Clearly, God's plan was to demonstrate that **God** would take the city. This was why all the silver and gold were to be given to God and the rest was to be totally destroyed. The people got nothing. The reason? So God would get **all** the glory. Why did the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord bear a sword? Perhaps it was to cut away all pride and every vestige of self-sufficiency.

  The city was totally burned (Josh. 6:24). It was neither spoiled nor plundered and nothing was removed. Everything was burned as it stood. Utensils and jars stayed in the houses. Grain remained in the grain pits. To give themselves stores during a siege, the people of Jericho had built huge underground storage bins. How do we know? Archaeologists have found them. Unburnt grain from this period has been planted and has grown. The present city of Jericho is not on the old site of Joshua's Jericho — today called Tell as Sultan.

So 'No' to Joshua:

- ✧ 'No' to the self-initiation of **your** plans
- ✧ 'No' to self-effort using your totally inadequate resources and strength
- ✧ 'No' to self-glorification

But neither is it passive — i.e. we do nothing and God does everything.

Joshua's response to the Vision

- ➢ **Surrender**

Before Jericho could fall, Joshua had to fall! He had to step down from his place of leadership and surrender to the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord. God is very clear as to the strategy, tactics and plans to overcome cities like Jericho. God has no trouble with cities, but He does have trouble with **us His people**. God's priority is to meet with His people over the task He has assigned to us. Note Joshua's words to the Commander: ***"What has my Lord to say to his servant?"***

There is no shared command in this warfare. It is:

- ✧ Lord Jesus — You give the orders
- ✧ Lord Jesus — You make all the decisions

- ✧ Lord Jesus — You do all the work

Our Commander, the Lord Jesus, will have no difficulty with the walls, **if** He can get us to fall at His feet in surrender **first**. There is no other way to overcome spiritual strongholds.

In many ways the secret of 'success' in the coming year of ministry is **now** in this retreat. It is your surrender at the feet of the Commander! One of the greatest difficulties we have is to get to the place where we are prepared to admit that the whole task is too big for us. The strongholds of the enemy are too great for us. If Jericho is to fall, **God** has to do it. If we try on our own we will be absolute failures.

- ➢ **Faith**
  "I have given" — not I will give. (Josh. 6:2)

The victory has now been won – Joshua's surrender was the key!

"Faith is the victory." "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

You have to expect to be victorious in order to experience victory. So the response is **faith** in the promises of the Word of God. Faith is ***"the substance of things hoped for — the evidence of things not seen."*** (Heb. 11:1)

The tactics that God gave to Joshua were a challenge to faith. In essence it was:

"Walk in circles, count to seven and shout!"

What sort of a plan is that? It must have been very strange for the people of Jericho watching the army march round in silence. The only sound reaching the walls was the sound of trumpets blown by the priests who were at the head of the procession with the Ark of the Covenant in the centre.

Probably on the second day the people of Jericho were beginning to jeer. There must have been great hilarity on the walls as the army marched around a twelfth time! Note that God's tactics take time — a whole week in this case. Many of our problems with God's tactics relate to His timing. Learn to trust God and learn to be patient. Hebrews 11:30 says, ***"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down …."***.

We need to come to the position of faith that Jericho is **God's gift** to us in Christ. The victory is ours, but only when we come to the place where we fully admit in the presence of God that we are utterly unable to take this Jericho by ourselves. ***"The vision waits still its appointed time. It hastens to the end. It will not prove false. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come; it will not delay"*** (Hab. 2:3).

- ➢ **The obedience of faith** — Jn. 14:21

We are ***"workers together with God"***, but God decides what should be done. And when asked, we help Him to do it. God asks our co-operation in a number of ways. God's promises are not designed to promote our inactivity and fatalism, but to spur us to effort.

- ✧ Sometimes God asks us to do 'foolish' things (foolish in the world's eyes). The plan to assault the walls of Jericho would be in this category. God did everything. In terms of assaulting the walls, the soldiers did nothing.
- ✧ Sometimes God gives a plan — such as the plan in Joshua 8 for the second Battle of Ai. It was a very sensible military plan involving mobility — surprise — deception. God gave the plan. Joshua and his army did all the fighting.
- ✧ In Joshua 10 again you have a battle. This time Joshua's army fought together with the Hosts of the Lord.

So victories result from a life of surrender — a life of faith and a life of obedience. This leads to a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. But faith and obedience are usually **tested**.

Normally an attacking army remains hidden until the very moment of attack. Not so this army! Thirteen times they walked around the city though no reason was given to them as to **why** they

should do this. The sequence of what should happen was explained to Joshua, but the people didn't know and Joshua only gave them instructions one day at a time.

Notice that the central feature of 'the march past' was the Ark of the Covenant. It is mentioned 11 times in this chapter. It was the symbol of God's presence. They were able to walk around in silence because, although they didn't know what God would do, they knew God was with them (the Ark of the Lord circled the city). It must have been a considerable test of obedience to remain completely silent (similar to the Red Sea event in Exodus 14:14, ***"The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent"*** — see also Zeph. I:7). But it is equally a mistake to think faith is just 'resting' on God's promises. It also requires **action** — remember Noah and the Ark.

- **Worship — the discipline of maintaining joy**

The people marching around the walls were told to shout while the walls were still standing. The priests were to blow on the rams horn and trumpets.

"Then all the people shall shout a great shout." v. 5

They had gone round the walls 12 times in silence. On the 13th time Joshua told the people:

"Shout for the Lord has given you the city." v. 16

After going round 7 times — about seven hours of marching — when they were absolutely shattered, God said, *"**Now** the battle is going to start."* This is another example to demonstrate that **God** was going to win the battle and not the people.

There is much in Scripture about shouting. Here are some of the passages.

1 Sam. 4:5 ***"As soon as the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout so the earth resounded."*** The result was that the Philistines were afraid saying, ***"Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?"***

2 Chron. 13:15 ***"Then the men of Judah raised the battle shout and when the men of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam …."***

Ezra 3:11-13 ***"All the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid … many shouted aloud for joy … and the sound was heard far away."***

Ps. 47:1 ***"Shout to God with loud songs of joy."***

Is. 12:6 ***"Shout and sing for joy … for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."***

Is. 42:11 ***"Let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy. Let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord."***

Jer. 31:7 ***"Sing aloud with gladness … and raise shouts for the Chief of the nations; proclaim give praise and say, 'O Lord save Your People.' "***

Jer. 51:14 ***"And they shall raise the shout of victory……."***

Zech. 9:9 ***"Shout aloud … behold your King is coming to you."*** [Then follows the prophecy of the Lord Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.]

Zeph. 3:14-15 ***"Shout … rejoice and exalt with all your heart ….The Lord … has cleared away your enemies. The Lord is in your midst. You shall never again fear evil."***

So 'shouting' was in the context of battle and it is in the context of praise because of the assurance of victory. Victory was assured because of the presence of the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord.

When faced with huge obstacles, enormous and complex difficulties, we have to learn **the discipline of maintaining joy**. For the joy of the Lord is our strength. (Neh. 8:10) Don't let Satan rob you of your joy when you are faced with impossible odds! Don't let fear enter your heart! Don't be paralysed into inaction. Learn to shout (!) at such times — **the victory shout** — "***Shout to God with loud songs of joy."*** Why? ***"Great in your midst is the Holy One."***

- **"Keep yourself from the accursed thing"** — 6:18

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory." (Ps. 115:1)

The cursed things had been given to destruction. Also note: ***"All silver and gold and every vessel of bronze and iron"*** were to be given to the treasury of the Lord. (v. 19)

One area where we rob God of what should be given exclusively to God is that we often **steal the glory from God**. Chapter 7 is about the disaster of the First Battle of Ai because Achan helped himself to 'the accursed thing'. We bring trouble on ourselves when we set our hearts on earthly things.

In 1904 there was an amazing revival in South Wales. The leader of this revival was Evan Roberts. The revival lasted about two years and then came to a rather abrupt halt. South Wales is littered with empty chapels built at that time and now it is rather a spiritual desert. What went wrong? Evan Roberts wrote later, *"Oh God, You could have done so much more if You could have trusted us not to take all the glory!"*

Spiritual pride and a spiritual elitism became common in the latter days of the revival. There was a spirit of competition among the leaders and, above all, a lack of sensitivity to sin — Joshua 7 again.

We need much more of a self-effacing spirit. Do we dishonour God when we eulogise people by saying, *"He is a great man or a remarkable preacher or a wonderful Bible teacher"* ?
How does the Lord God get glory from that? We can do little more to destroy a leader's usefulness than to puff him up with flattery! Remember, ***"My glory, I will not give to another"***. (Is. 42:8)

How easy it is to flatter ourselves with self-deceitfulness. We struggle with our egos. The stench of our spiritual pride goes up to God as we rob Him of His glory. Pride is essentially an 'anti-God' frame of mind. It is easily seen:

- We sense a spirit of competitiveness.
- Pride loves power. It is a sickness that leads to hostility to others.
- Pride leads you to worship the false God of achievement.

One useful check to use on ourselves is: **Do I enjoy the praise of men more than I enjoy pleasing and worshipping God in private?**

Be careful. Always ask God to check out your heart after every victory — a good message — a good day of outreach etc. — to see if there is any pollution of pride in you. Be utterly determined to give **all** the glory to Him and keep nothing for yourself. Keep saying, ***"He has done marvellous things! His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Himself the victory"*** (Ps. 98:1). Let all our reports say:

> ***"Today the Lord has brought deliverance."*** (1 Sam. 9:14)
>
> ***"The Lord made a great victory that day."*** (2 Sam. 19:9)

On a continuous basis we need to be God-honouring and self-abasing. Like David we must say, ***"Blessed be the Lord my strength who teaches my hands to war, my fingers to fight"***. (Ps. 144:1)

Summary

The burden on my heart is that we are surrounded by Jerichos that stand and mock our efforts. They laugh at our feeble attempts. Oh here and there we see some impact, but generally we need to say, *"Lord, we are absolutely helpless!"*

But every Jericho will fall! (1 Thess. 4:16) ***"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout … with the trump of God ."*** Remember, ***"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds".*** (2 Cor. 10:4)

What lessons can we learn? Closed doors and high walls are no problem to God or to us if **God is with us**.

When faced with your particular Jericho:

1. Get a fresh vision of the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord — the God of all power.

2. Say **no** to self-initiation — self-effort — self-glorification.

3. Cast yourself in fresh surrender at the Lord's feet. Then live a life of:

- **Faith** — faith is to see that which is invisible to sight and reason
- **Obedience** — God's promises do not render it unnecessary to obey God orders
- **Joy** — praise and thanksgiving — the place of honour was given to the Ark — the symbol of God's presence
- **Abhorrence of pride** — God pours contempt on our pride

Write down today — just between you and God:

1. What has God been saying to me?
2. What am I going to do in response?

4. John's Vision: The Throne and in the midst of the Throne a Lamb – Rev. 4 and 5

Introduction

On Easter morning in 1799 the people in a small town in the Austrian Alps, by the name of Feldkirch, awoke to find Napoleon and the entire French army advancing on the town. Knowing that their meagre defences would never withstand Napoleon, the authorities in the town called a quick meeting to decide whether to hoist a white flag and surrender. This was what they decided to do.

The pastor of the church also spoke and said that it was Easter morning, *"This is the day of our King's Resurrection. We must have a moment of joy and triumph. Let us ring the bells, then let us surrender. But we must ring the bells."*

This is what they did. The bells rang out their glorious sound and it reverberated through the valleys and hills filling the frosty air with the sound of joy and victory.

The army massed outside the small town were confounded. Why were they celebrating? They made the assumption that the Austrian army was advancing and, not wanting to fight in such a place, the French army retreated and kept going back. When the bells stopped ringing they had gone. (French military records say there was a sudden retreat, but they don't say why!)

We are like that town. We are under siege from a mighty adversary. Powers and principalities and forces of evil seek to destroy the 'City of God' by every possible devious means. Our cause seems doomed and the followers of Jesus defeated.

But we don't see it like this at all. We ring the bells because the Lord Jesus has won! Our shouts of joy rise above the strife. Whatever our current experience, we know the Kingdom of God will triumph.

The Book of Revelation is ***"the Revelation of Jesus Christ"***. The book starts with a wonderful revelation of the Lord Jesus in chapter one. It is written in symbolic language (see v. 12-16). Each feature is of great significance.

"And His head and His hair were like white wool — as white as snow." [Having white hair is a symbol of great wisdom in the Middle East.]

Then the Lord Jesus gave seven letters to the seven churches in western Turkey — each with a searching message.

Chapter 4: A Vision of the Throne of God

What John saw

Ezekiel 1:26 gives a very similar view of the Throne of God. It was not a sight put on especially for John. It is always happening. John was seeing things as they really are. If we saw a door into heaven and were invited to enter this is what we would see.

➢ **The Throne was not empty!** The vision of the person on the Throne is described in the symbolism of three precious stones –— jasper, carnelian and emerald. Jasper and carnelian are the first and the last stones in the High Priest's breastplate.

- **Jasper** is probably what we call diamond and as it sparkles it symbolises the purity of white light in all its components. It speaks to us of the beauty of the holiness of God.
- **Carnelian** is what we call a ruby and it points to the wrath of God. (***"Our God is a consuming fire"*** — Heb. 12:29).
- **Emerald:** ***"A rainbow that is the appearance of an emerald."*** Ezekiel saw a bow. (Ez. 1:28) The chief component of the rainbow was green. The rainbow is a symbol of the grace and

mercy of God (Gen. 9:8-17). Also remember Ps. 23:3, ***"He makes me lie down in green pastures"***. Green speaks of the abundant and healthy provision of God.

The Throne is a major symbol in Revelation. It is mentioned 46 times in the book. [God's sovereign rule over all is mentioned 77 times.] The Throne speaks of God's authority, His rule and His judgment. So God reigns in unapproachable splendour, seated, undisturbed and untroubled by the conflict raging in the cosmos, but yet very concerned and involved!

- ***"Around the Throne were 24 Thrones" on which were seated the elders."*** The elders have white garments and crowns. They are probably human beings who have overcome, for they have been given ***"white garments"*** (3:5),***"crowns"*** (2:10) and ***"thrones"*** (3:21). Why 24? Perhaps they represent the whole People of God under the Old and New Covenants — 12 from the Old and 12 from the New. Perhaps they also represent the 24 orders of priests (1 Chron. 24:4-5).

Lightning and thunder are used in the Old Testament to signify God's presence and power. Remember Moses on Mount Sinai.

- ***"The living creatures"*** (v. 6-8) are called cherubim in Ezekiel 10:20. They are like a lion representing bravery, an ox representing strength, an eagle representing speed and man representing intelligence.

So the 24 elders represent the People of God –— the church through all time. The living creatures represent God's created world in all its characteristics (both physical and angelic) in their pristine state. The "sea" is a crystalline sea — i.e. you can't wade in it or swim in it. It symbolises a barrier separating the Throne from everything else!

The worship of God as the Creator

What John saw was the worship of God as **the Creator**. Those living creatures, representing all creation, demonstrate their love and zeal for God by their worship.

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

They don't cease day or night to lift up their voices in praise.

Revelation 4 is awesome — ***"Christ is the image of the invisible God — the Creator of the ends of the earth"*** (Col. 1:15). He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. [Remember the second law of thermodynamics.] All life as we know it is held together by His word and His will. The original word, ***"Let there be light"*** was His word. The power that called the whole physical universe into being from the 'big bang' onwards, was His work. Its design in all its elegance, glory and magnificence; its beauty and its loveliness were all the work of a Creator.
This should draw worship from our hearts — worship of God the Creator.

How can we make all this real in our lives?

I want to bring you a phrase from Revelation 4:2 — "***Behold, a Throne ….***"

- **The comfort of *"beholding the Throne"***

It is a great joy to me, and an amazing relief to know that **God** is on the Throne. He is in control of all events. Evil will **not** triumph. Events are moving — change is a constant — towards the completion of all God's purposes. When living in Saudi Arabia, we learned that if you want any problems and difficulties solved, you should go to the highest man — to the Throne!

God knows all and is the Sovereign Almighty God, great in holiness and power. He is in control and He is working out His purposes of bringing everything under the feet of the Lord Jesus. This is true on a **macro** scale of the nations and the earth, but it is also true on a **micro** scale of my family and me. This is a very great comfort!

So remember the very empowering and reassuring discipline of ***"Behold, the Throne"***.

- **The challenge of *"beholding the Throne"***

Because God is on the Throne, He has the right to rule! Rev. 4:11, ***"Because for Your will they exist and were created"***. **God has the right to rule over us!**

What is **the essence of sin**? It is not merely doing something that is convenient at the moment, but that hurts other people. It isn't just breaking an ethical code of conduct. No! Sin is rebellion against the Throne and a refusal to allow God to rule over us! Nearly all religions make God a convenience to man's selfish desires. So religious practices are designed to enable us to get our own way — seeking to manipulate this 'god' through our own practices and processes.

True repentance is returning to that Throne and bowing in complete acknowledgement of God's authority over me again. The prodigal son returned, not only geographically — i.e. to live in close proximity to his father — but in a Middle Eastern context, he returned to live under his father's authority.

If a vision of the Throne of God seems to terrify you and to be harsh and austere, remember, there is a rainbow around the Throne — the symbol of grace and mercy. When you return in repentance, you return to the loving warmth of the mercy and grace of the love of God as well as to the authority of his rule! The way of rebellion is always the way of misery! Praise God, there is a rainbow around the Throne as we are invited to return to that Throne in repentance.

So this year, often: ***"Behold a Throne"***. What you will see is a very great **comfort**. There is order, purpose and control both in the physical realm of the universe and in the spiritual realm. And although there is a cosmic war, God wins! God is overruling all the events in my life.

You also see a great **challenge** to bow, to repent and to submit to that Throne and acknowledge that God is the only and supreme authority in your life.

Chapter 5: The Worship of God the Redeemer

Chapter 4 is awesome, but in chapter 5 all heaven breaks out in great peels of worship and praise for **the Creator has become the Redeemer**. To create Jesus had only to speak, but to redeem Jesus had to be incarnated into the body of a man and to bleed and die.

All of heaven is amazed, "**To plumb the depths of Love Divine**"! And all this is going on right now! Sometimes in our earthly worship we have experienced a faint echo of this. At our highest moments when we are truly happiest, we are in some way linked into that vast sea of worship. We are, "**Lost in wonder, love and praise**". It is then we say, *"Yes, this is what I was made to do!"*.

So, Revelation 4 — the worship of God our Creator

Revelation 5 — the worship of God our Redeemer

Truly, **"God in the Gospel of His Son has all His mightiest deeds outdone!"**

What John Saw

In God's hand was a **scroll**. As the rest of Revelation unfolds, the scroll is clearly the title deed of all creation — physical and spiritual. It was ***"written on both sides"*** (God doesn't waste anything). Usually scrolls were written on the smooth inner side. If there was a lot to say, it was also written on the rougher outer surface. So this scroll contained "The whole council of God".
It was a complete account of the whole plan of God. God ***"sealed it with seven seals"*** — a Roman expression of the last will and testimony. So it contained God's programme for putting down all evil and the establishment of God's Kingdom in all creation including the cosmos.

On my first year in mission overseas I worked in France (1963-64). There I was introduced to Sartre and Camus and other French existentialist writers. In this literature I began to understand the horror of a life of meaninglessness — no creator — no purpose — no meaning — life being

ruled by chance! In the language of Revelation 5 — no-one was worthy to take the scroll and to administer the programme. It was enough to make you weep. But there is no need, for we are given three symbols of the Lord Jesus:

Jesus is worthy! <u>He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah</u>. He is the source of all authority – all sovereignty. This lion has conquered! The Lion of **Judah** — Judah means the praise of the Lord. It is the name given to Judah by Leah in her sorrow.

Jesus is worthy because <u>He is the Root of David</u>. ***"I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."*** (Rev. 22:16) This is great news for us. ***"The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles and in Him will the Gentiles hope."*** (Rom. 15:12)

Jesus is worthy because <u>He is the Lamb</u>. The One who was slain is now alive and standing in the midst of the Throne. Initially He stood between the Throne and the four living creatures — i.e. between the Throne and all creation and among the elders — His rightful place as the Chief Shepherd. (1 Pet. 5:4)

Seven signifies completeness, so seven horns implies complete and total power. Seven eyes symbolises the faculty of discernment. So the risen Lord Jesus is declared to be the complete power of God and the complete wisdom of God in all of creation! Notice the little phrase (v. 6) ***"into all the earth"***. Jesus won the victory on the earth and, as a result, the whole Kingdom of believers ***"will reign on earth"***. (v. 10)

A lamb is a symbol of gentleness and meekness and the surrender of rights. This is the chosen symbol of the Lord Jesus in Revelation. A lamb is perhaps the meekest and gentlest of all God's creatures. Lambs don't snap at each other or fight. They don't retaliate or quarrel. If one lamb is sucking on its mother's nipple and another lamb comes, the first lamb leaves and hands on the food to the other lamb. They so easily give up their rights! But they are happy little creatures! Leading lambs to the slaughter is so easy! It is very different with pigs. They squeal and squirm and try and get away. Lambs seem to understand that something bad is going to happen for they shiver. But there is no attempt to escape.

John thought he was going to see a lion — a magnificent, majestic, all-powerful lion (perhaps something like C.S. Lewis' Aslan of Narnia) — a lion who had fought through and overcome all his enemies — a victor worthy to open the scroll. Now Jesus **is** a Lion. He is the Overcomer. He has gotten Himself the victory. He has disarmed the principalities and powers. But the picture of the Lamb shows **<u>how</u> He got the victory**.

By weakness and defeat He won the crown and trod His foes beneath his feet by being trodden down.

The Lamb represented the way He achieved the victory! A victory won with grace and humility! So there is a Lamb on the Throne!

Heaven's response — the worship of the Lamb

There are three songs of worship here:

- The worship of the living creatures and elders
- The worship of the angels
- The worship of every living thing

➢ **The worship of the living creatures and elders**

The elders have harps — the traditional instruments used to praise God. They also carry golden bowls full of incense — symbolising the gathered prayers of believers. Our prayers ascend to God like the sweet savour of burnt offerings, saturating heaven with the fragrance of devotion!

They start a 'new song' — new in the sense of a new nature, because what the Lamb accomplished is so different and so superior to anything in the Old Covenant. New works of grace call forth new songs of praise. What's new? Before it was just Jews, now ***"every tribe and language and people***

and nation" are in the family. The Great Commission is completed. The Gospel has reached into every part of society everywhere!

And we are ***"A Kingdom and priests to our God"*** in fulfilment of the promise given to Moses at Sinai (Ex. 19:6). So we, as the people of a Kingdom, ***"rule on earth"*** and as priests, we will wait on Him in perpetual service. Nothing is deserved and nothing is earned. Redemption is solely the unmerited gift of eternal love. Jesus paid for it all!

Tennyson, the great English poet of the 19th century, once stayed for a night in the house of two Methodists. On arriving at the house he asked his hostess if there was any current news. *"Why Mr Tennyson,"* she said, *"There is only one piece of news I know — that Jesus died for all men."* Tennyson was very surprised, but he replied, *"Well, that's old news and good news and new news."* This news never gets old — not even in eternity.

Fanny Crosby expounded this concept in a hymn.

Praise Him, praise Him, Jesus our blessed Redeemer.
For our sins He suffered and bled and died.
He our rock, our hope of eternal salvation,
Hail Him, Hail Him, Jesus the Crucified.

Sing His praises, Jesus who bore our sorrows.
Love unbounded, wonderful, deep and strong.
Praise Him, praise Him, tell of His excellent greatness.
Praise Him, praise Him ever in joyful song.

- ***The worship of the angels***

There is a story of Celtic monastery in Ireland where they had a discipline of continuous worship day and night over the years. When one monk stopped singing another would pick up the song. But on one occasion Vikings overran the monastery. They killed the monks, including those who were singing. But one monk escaped for he was outside the walls when the raid happened. But when he heard the song of praise stop, he immediately took up the song of praise, thus betraying where he was and he was also killed.

As soon as the living creatures and the Elders stopped, the mighty sound of millions of angels burst out in singing the songs of worship. These are unfallen angels with no need of redemption, but they have a special interest in the evangelisation of the world (1 Pet. 1:12 and 1 Cor. 4:9). And so they celebrate our redemption crying out:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

They have watched in excited anticipation of all God has planned from Genesis 1:2 — from the beginning. And they know that what the Lamb has done has liberated countless people from the chains of death and raised them to a position higher than their own! We were created to be the sons of God. They were created to be His servants.

So the Lamb is worthy to receive:

- **Power:** the ability to perform
- **Riches:** denoting infinite resources and the fullness of every divine gift.
  "The unfathomable riches of Christ."
- **Wisdom:** to know the greatest end and the best means to attain it
- **Strength:** the ability to disarm and conquer any enemy
- **Honour:** an eminence that excels all others
- **Glory:** Divine splendour — to see Him is to see the very Shekinah of the Majesty on high
- **Blessing:** The one gift that we who have nothing to give, can give to Him who possesses all

Worship is to contemplate the nature of God and to bask in His glory. It is our response to the infinite majesty of God. It is our preoccupation of ourselves with God Himself.

- ***The worship of every living thing*** (5:13)

Worship now reaches to the whole universe — the totality of rational beings. Angels, elders and living creatures are joined by all people. Who are those who are under the earth who praise Him? There has been much speculation; possibly it is those who never received the Good News about Jesus. Can there be a recognition of Jesus through natural revelation — limited though it may be? Can those people who died in unbelief rise up to praise Him? Whatever it means, one day, ***"Every knee"*** will bow before Him and ***"every tongue confess"*** that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11). One can only imagine how deliberate rebels must feel who join in this universal praise with bitter pangs of remorse.

Both Father and Son are equally worshipped. There is a close relationship between God and the Lamb in Revelation.

- ✧ They are both involved in judgment 6:16
- ✧ They both receive the first fruits of redemption 14:1,4
- ✧ They both illuminate heaven 21:22-23
- ✧ Out of them both proceeds the water of life 22:1,3

The universal dimensions are breath-taking! How God will bring forth praise from every creature is not told to us, but the proclamation of the Gospel is surely part of it. The Cross demands a response, first as a submission to its claims and then as a witness to its power. This message must be heard.

A man came to R.A. Torrey and said, *"I am not a Christian, but I am moral and upright. I would like to know what you have against me."* Torrey looked the man in the eye and said, *"I charge you with treason against heaven's King"*. It is not our Gospel, but His!

Making this real in our own experience

There is a Lamb on the Throne!

There are two reasons I am really glad about this. The first reason is that it **convicts** me and the second reason is that it **comforts** me.

- **The Challenge of knowing a Lamb is on the Throne**

Jesus is called a Lamb because this is His character. He is gentle and meek. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. They found it so easy — a small plot and in less than 24 hours He was dead. They came against Him with swords and staves and He asked them, ***"Who are you looking for?"*** When they told Him, He said, ***"I am He"*** and they all fell backwards. The New Testament emphasises that, ***"He gave Himself up for us all"***. Giving yourself up is a voluntary act. There was no need for swords. He is a Lamb. Jesus said, ***"I am meek and lowly in heart"***.

The world says, *"The man who acts like a lamb will get into the stew!"* and it was true of Jesus. He was led to the Cross. He was reviled, but gave no answer. He was threatened, but called in no legion of angels. He let them do it — the Lord of Creation — whipped and then treated like a bit of wood, having nails driven into Him.

He gave himself up because He is a Lamb. This is His nature and His character. He still loves His enemies. He still wants to bless those who curse Him. He still wants to forgive us — "Meekness and Majesty".

BUT, the One who exercises the authority of the eternal Throne is a Lamb. **The commands and wishes of the Lord Jesus are far more searching and convicting because He is a Lamb.**

If there was a tiger on the Throne I could be a tiger. I would enjoy being a tiger — prowling, devouring, beautiful but terrifying. But no! There is a Lamb on the Throne and the one thing I find I

can't be is a Lamb! Why should I humble myself? Why should I esteem others better than myself? Why should I forgive my enemies? Why should I pour out my life for others?

All I do must be conditioned by the fact that there is a Lamb on the Throne.
God is love. He really loves each of us. He will never forget you. It is impossible for God to forget you for, ***"You are written on the palms of His hands"*** (Is. 49:14). ***"O, Lord, how vast are Your thoughts concerning me".*** (Ps. 139:17) Love is always thinking of the object of that love! God wants to affirm us. ***"He will rejoice over you with gladness …. He will exult over you with loud singing".*** (Zeph. 3:17)

In 1 John 4 it says twice that God loves **you**. Because God loves you, I must love you too and, if not, then God's love does not dwell in my heart and I don't love God. If you hate people, if they irritate you, you don't know God. God knows your faults better than you do; yet He still loves you.

It is very searching to know that there is a Lamb on the Throne. **What that Throne dispenses is the Rule of the Lamb.** So often I am blind to the Rule of the Lamb. In my heart I find anger and frustration — *"I won't stand for that!"* I am acting like a tiger, but there is a Lamb on the Throne.

What sort of things does the Lamb convict us of? In Ps. 50:8-11 we read that God doesn't convict us of too few sacrifices, but He does convict us when:

- ✧ We play with moral ethics and change them for our convenience
- ✧ We pay back to others as they have done to us
- ✧ We answer back and defend ourselves
- ✧ We nourish hard and bitter feelings

Why do we do these things? It is because deep down we think God is like that. That's being 'tigerish'. But there is a Lamb on the Throne! God is deeply grieved when we hurt and wrong others — those whom He loves. God is always on the side of the poor and needy. Why? Because there is a Lamb on the Throne.

In Leviticus 19 we find what has been called the Old Testament Sermon on the Mount. Here are some excerpts:

- "***You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy."*** v. 2
- There were rules about gleaning so the poor and strangers would not starve. v. 9
- We must pay the wages of a daily hired worker on that day so he can buy supper for his family on the way home. v. 13
- We must care for the deaf and the blind. v. 14
- We must care for the elderly. v. 12
- ***"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*** v. 18
- You must care for strangers. ***"You should love him as yourself."*** v. 34-35

What sort of God is this who cares about the poor, the deaf, the blind, the elderly and the strangers and insists that we care as well?

There is a Lamb upon the Throne!

An example of God convicting us:

2 Sam. 21 speaks of 3 years of famine in the land. David sought the presence of the Lord about the cause of the famine. The Lord said to David, ***"Saul sought to exterminate the Gibeonites"*** who were a small non-Jewish minority that lived in the land (strangers). Saul killed them and stole their lands and farms. David had not been involved at all, but he was in a position to put it right and he had done nothing! So God sent a famine on the land because He cares about the treatment of despised minorities.

Brothers and sisters, because He is a Lamb and deeply cares about injustice, He will put us 'on the mat' for our cold-heartedness.

There is a Lamb on the Throne. It is very searching and very convicting! I am no lamb! So I am often 'on the mat' before God for my lack of love, my lack of care (I find it hard to pray about all the crisis situations in the world) and for my neglect of others and over-concern about myself. Being convicted is painful, but it is also a great blessing because it brings again a fresh realisation that there is a Lamb upon the Throne.

General William Booth of the Salvation Army was once asked the secret of his success. He hesitated and tears came to his eyes and ran down his face. He said, *"I will tell you a secret. God has had all there was to have of me. There may have been men with greater opportunities, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and a vision of what Jesus Christ could do, I made up my mind that God would have all there was of William Booth. If there is anything of power in the Salvation Army today, it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will and all the influencing of my life."*

So it is a challenge to know there is a Lamb on the Throne.

- **The Comfort of knowing a Lamb is on the Throne**

Jesus is the Lamb of God because it describes what He is in His character, but also **because of what He has done as our Redeemer**.

- Sacrificed Lambs are associated with being **saved** from judgment (the Passover lamb — the guilt offering — the peace offering — the day of atonement). It means everything to me that there is a Lamb on the Throne. It is very, very comforting. Isaac Watts wrote:

  Jesus, my Great High Priest, offered His blood and died.
  My guilty conscience seeks no sacrifice beside.
  His powerful blood did once atone and now
  It pleads before the Throne. Hallelujah!

  If I have sinned and grieved God and hurt others, it has been anticipated — there is a Lamb on the Throne! He died for me and now He pleads for me. When Satan tempts me to despair and give up or when he shows me my guilt, I look up and behold, there is a Lamb on the Throne and He has made an end of all my sin!

  Abraham is a very great prophet, but his only words of prophecy were said to Isaac, ***"My son, God will provide for Himself a lamb"***. So if you start to blame yourself for your failures and the mess you are in, the Holy Spirit will lift up your head and say to you, *"Behold, the Lamb on the Throne"*.

  We know that His blood is powerful enough to cover every sin because He is on the Throne. He overcame! There is no limit to His grace that He wants to pour out on repentant sinners. Turn to Him. Bow your knee and an avalanche of love and mercy will fall on you. Why? Because there is a Lamb on the Throne and healing comes when we receive that love.

  We have **value** because there is a Lamb on the Throne. We live in a devaluing, dehumanising world. Often we are reduced to a number — i.e. a passport number. But because Jesus died, we become inheritors of all that is in God's will:

  "Therefore He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred …." (Heb. 9:15)

  All God's promises to us are, 'Yes'. According to Dr Paul Choi, there are ~8000 promises that God has given for **this life**. There are more for the future in eternity.
  Why do we become beneficiaries of the will? It is because we are of infinite value to God. The Lamb on the Throne is proof of this. He died to bring us blessing!

- No one can bring any **charge** against you.
- No one can separate you from God's love. Why? Because there is a Lamb on the Throne.
- Jesus is my righteousness. We get peace with God in our conscience by recognising we are sinners, there is a Lamb on the Throne and He has taken our sin and has given us righteousness — the one requirement we could never obtain. No one can rob us of 'our righteousness' because the Lamb is on the Throne. He is our righteousness and we know our righteousness is good enough because He is on the Throne — the highest place of all. So we have liberty and boldness to approach the Throne in all its radiant holiness, because there is a Lamb on the Throne.
- We can be progressive partakers of the Divine Nature — the nature of the Lamb. We need to confess we haven't got it. At the Cross, as we bow in surrender, we receive that nature as a gift. Sometimes you meet someone who you sense is 'holy'. There is something of the beauty of holiness about them. If you ask such people how they became holy, they are shocked and deny it. They say something like, *"I try and stay low on my face before the Throne with my eyes on Jesus the Lamb of God"*. As they look, they are changed from glory to glory.

The secret of many things in a life of discipleship is to:

"Behold a Throne and a Lamb in the midst of the Throne"

"Dear dying Lamb your precious blood shall never lose its power." So there is hope for us all.

Summary

We have seen four men who had a vision of God:

- **Isaiah:** seeing the Throne and the holiness of God
- **Paul:** meeting the **man who came down** and how that broke his pride and he was ***"crucified with Christ"*** and found this to be **the way up** in resurrection power
- **Joshua:** meeting the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord — the God of almighty power — our victorious Lord Jesus
- **John:** ***"Beholding the Throne"*** and seeing ***"the Lamb in the midst of the Throne"***

There are others we could have looked at — Gideon, Moses and Abraham.

I long that we will all have a fresh vision of the Lord Jesus and then **run** with our eyes fixed on Jesus. It is the only way to live!