

Uzziah

DEVOTION LIMITED AND GRACE NEVER CEASING.

^(Uzziah) "And he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. And he set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the vision of God: and as long as he sought Jehovah, God made him to prosper." 2 Chron. 26:4-5

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple." Isaiah 6:1.

1. Devotion Limited.

A first reading of 2 Chron. 26:4-5 gives the impression that king Uzziah about whom the writer here is speaking had a pretty good case of religion, a real devotion to God. He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. He sought the Lord. A closer reading of the text and study of the context reveal that his devotion to the Lord was to some extent limited, particularly as to its quality and to its duration.

1) Its quality was like that of his father's. It is said of his father, Amaziah, that he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, but not with a perfect heart. He lapsed into idolatry. His heart lifted him up to boast. In other words neither Uzziah's nor his father's religion was perfect. Their devotion to the Lord was limited in quality. Do you want the religion of your child to be like your own?

2) The duration of Uzziah's devotion to the Lord was evidently limited to the days of Zechariah, the one skilled in the seeing of God, who gave him instruction in the fear of God. It is thought that this man died when Uzziah was about forty years old, the man who had been his spiritual and political guide and counsellor. This was evidently the occasion of quite a change in the king's life, when his valued teacher passed away.

2. The Effect of Limited Devotion.

^{Material Prosperity -}
1) "As long as he sought Jehovah, God made him to prosper." Judging from the paragraph immediately following this statement this was apparently material prosperity, and the goodness of God was the efficient cause of it. Uzziah had military successes, and God helped him in them. He waxed exceeding strong. He built public works. He had big pastoral interests. His name spread far abroad. "For he was marvelously helped till he was strong." But,

^{Spiritual Tragedy}
2) In the wake of all this material prosperity came spiritual tragedy. Now comes a colossal spiritual tragedy as recorded in these words: "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against Jehovah his God; for he went into the temple of Jehovah to burn incense upon the altar of incense." Pride, a sin of his father, a sin ever so fatal came into his heart, and he presumed to take over the place of the priest in the temple service. It might be considered a form of profanity. "The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works." For his pride and profanity he was sternly rebuked by Azariah the priest who took along with him 80 others, priests of Jehovah. Uzziah added to his sin by despising this reproof. There is a proverb which says, "Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth correction; But he that regardeth reproof shall be honored." How prevalent, particularly with those in high authority is this sin of despising the correction of the Lord. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews quoting Proverbs says, "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, Nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him; For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Instead of heeding the reproof of the priests Uzziah was wroth.. "and while he was wroth there came upon him

3) Physical Adversity. "The leprosy brake forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of Jehovah." Josephus connects this incident with the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1:1 and Zech. 14:5. He says, "A great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone thru it, and fell upon

the king's face, inasmuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately." Perhaps he was weaving together legends without historical accuracy, but the horror of the scene made a deep impression." Uzziah was isolated for the remainder of his life, and was buried in a leper's grave.

3. Grace Never Ceasing.

Over against the sad ending of the Uzziah story there may be thrown the bright picture of streams of mercy never ceasing. The prophet Isaiah, who according to tradition was a cousin of king Uzziah, has left us this record of his experience in the temple—an experience in striking contrast to that of Uzziah. "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple."

Every good thing that Uzziah had received all thru his long reign as king of Judah had come from the God of his fathers. The goodness of God was evident repeatedly.

God made him to prosper. God helped him. Even Jehovah smote him. In addition to all these benefits Uzziah had the benefits of the spiritual ministry of God's servants. 1) He had the help of Zechariah for many years to instruct him in the fear of the Lord. Zechariah was evidently a man of fine spiritual understanding, a wonderful blessing to the king. Blessed indeed is any ruler who has the benefit of excellent Christian teachers. Eisenhower has such men of God as Dr. Louis Evans, and Billy Graham.

2) Then God was good to Uzziah in sending to him Azariah and eighty other priests to reprove him for his sins. This reproof seemed very grievous to Uzziah at the time. "All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness." We wonder ~~that~~ if Uzziah during those long years of affliction was not exercised thereby, and under the grace of God led to repentance.

3) Isaiah had his wonderful vision of the Lord of glory in the year that king Uzziah died. I wonder if the vision was received before the death of Uzziah even if in that year. Did Uzziah have the opportunity before passing away to hear the gospel message from the gospel prophet, Isaiah, the king of the prophets? I can imagine, thru the grace of God never ceasing, that Isaiah with the Spirit of God upon him, and fresh from his glorious experience in the temple when he responded to the call of God by saying, Here am I send me, went to the bedside of Uzziah. He might have found him in excruciating pain, with miserable sores all over his body, yet humbled under the mighty hand of God. And I can imagine young Isaiah had a message for the king direct from the throne of grace, and that he might have clothed the message in these words, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; tho they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Could the response of the old king have been in the spirit of the hymnwriter as he said, "Lord now indeed I find, Thy power, and Thine alone, Can change the leper's spots and mend the heart of stone. Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe, Sin has left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."

Streams of mercy never ceasing continued after the death of Uzziah. His son, Jotham who reigned in his stead, "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah had done: howbeit he entered not into the temple of Jehovah — so Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before Jehovah his God." Perhaps he heard more of glorious grace direct from Isaiah as he said, "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found— for he will abundantly pardon."

Before leaving the Uzziah story let us observe seven lessons from it of practical value for today.

1) A father may hinder or help a son's devotion to God.

"What sort of a father are you to your boy?
Do you know if your standing is good?
Do you ever take stock of yourself and check up
Your accounts with your boy as you should?"

Take stock of yourself and consider the lad;
Your time and your thought are his due;
How would you answer your God, should He ask,
What sort of father are you?"

2) There is a great temptation to backslide when the preacher is gone. How many churches go to pieces when without a pastor.

3) Prosperity may easily be a temptation to pride. Compare Uzziah with leprosy and Paul with the thorn in the flesh.

4) We must not lose sight of the importance of reverence in the sight of God. Isaiah emphasized the holiness of God. "The Holy One of Israel."

5) Taking reproof in the right spirit is a big factor in spiritual growth, and the opposite spirit is tragic.

6) Wisdom from above is necessary for a Christian philosophy of adversity.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Carries yet a precious jewel in its head."

7) The lamp of God's grace given to David and his children continues to shine. Over the leper's grave is the Lord of glory, upon His throne, high and lifted up. It is He who appeared of old to His people and said, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."