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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lesson for November 11
Golden Text—“I will praise the Lord with my whole heart,” in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. —Psa. 111:1.

The Lesson as a Whole
It is unfortunate in selecting lesson material that no distinction seems to be made at times between Israel, God's covenant people of old, and the Church, the body of Christ, in the present dispensation of grace. The difference vitally affects the question of worship. Before the cross, God recognized a typical ritualistic system, the careful observance of which was part of the prescribed worship connected with the sanctuary at Jerusalem. Jesus told of a new meaning which the worship of God was to take on as the new age came fully into view. There are now no sacred shrines of wood or stone nor do we have a special order of priests to come between the people and God. Gorgeous vestments and sensuous services have no real place in the worship of the church. All is now spiritual. The true worshippers are those who have been born from above and so are enabled to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). That which is merely of the flesh, though cultured and esthetic, has no real place in such worship (Phil. 3:3) which is the overflowing of grateful hearts as the Lord Jesus Himself is before the soul and a realization of the glory and majesty of God overwhelms the spirit.

Worship should be distinguished from prayer (in the sense of petition) and from the ministry of the Word, though these may be definitely connected with it. For as we approach God our Father in prayer, our hearts go out to Him in adoration and praise, and all true spiritual ministry leads to worship in spirit and in truth.

Verse by Verse
Isa. 6:1—“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord.” Uzziah died a leper because of his rashness in seeking to intrude into priestly functions, from which the Law definitely debarred him. (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Isaiah's vision took place in the Temple, the earth-

ly sanctuary, where he had gone up to worship in accord with the will of God at that time.

Verse 2—“The seraphim, each one had six wings. The seraphim are an order of angelic ministers of the grace of God, as the cherubim are the executors of His Judgment (see Ezek. 1, 2). These glorious beings have six wings—two to hide their faces as they worship before the throne, two to cover their feet as they stand before the Eternal Majesty, and two to fly as the representatives of the Lord Himself, to carry the Word of His grace to mankind.”

Verse 3—“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts.” In their song of praise the seraphim express their adoration of the true God as they ascribe threefold holiness to Him who sits on the throne of the universe and fills the earth with His glory.

Verse 4—“The posts of the door moved—the house was filled with smoke.” The entire sanctuary was swayed by the manifest presence of the Lord as the fragrant incense ascended heavenward, typical of the united prayers of the people of God (Psa. 141:2). All of this bespeaks a condition before the rending of the veil, by which the way has now been opened into the Holiest of all (Heb. 10:19-23).

Verse 5—“Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips.” A sudden realization of the holiness of God brought with it a sense of Isaiah's own unfitness for the divine presence. He felt in his inmost being that he was defiled and unclean, even as, long years after, Peter the fisherman felt when consciously in the presence of the Creator incarnate (Luke 5:8), and as Job felt when a sense of the majesty of Jehovah burst upon his soul (Job 42:5, 6). It is always thus when one comes to such recognition of the holiness, power, and majesty of God. Unclean lips come from an unclean heart and this is part of our inheritance from Adam. Isaiah confessed his own sinfulness and that of all the people among whom he moved; “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Verse 6—“A live coal... from off the altar.” This spoke of the consumed sacrifice, a sacrifice that prefigured the propitiatory work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 7—“Thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged!” When the seraphim applied the glowing coal to the seer's lips, he gave him the assurance of iniquity pardoned and sin cleansed away. This assurance all may have now who rest in faith upon the finished work of Christ.

Verse 8—“Here am I; send me.” After assurance of pardon and cleansing comes true service. Isaiah heard the call for one to carry God's message to the people. Rejoicing in

the consciousness of acceptance before God, he responded gladly to the question put by the Lord Himself, “Who will go for us?”

Eph. 5:15—“Work circumspectly.” Our English word, “circumspectly,” means to look in a circle; that is, to watch carefully where the feet are being placed. In a world filled with pitfalls and snares on every side, how particular one needs to be as to where he walks and how!

Verse 16—“Redeeming the time.” That is, buying up opportunities for service. “The days are evil” indeed, and the Christian should ever be on the lookout for occasions of service for God and in behalf of his fellow men.

Verse 17—“Understanding what the will of the Lord is.” It is only as we familiarize ourselves with the Word of the Lord that we shall understand His will. It is by patient study of the Scriptures that we learn the mind and purpose of God and so are enabled to act in accordance therewith.

Verse 18—“Be not drunk with wine.... but be filled with the Spirit.” A man under the influence of the spirit that dwells in the wine cup is taken out of himself and acts contrary to his ordinary habits and behavior. This is always in a degrading way (Pro. 23:31-35). In a higher and holy sense the man who is under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit is lifted above himself and enabled to do and say what he could not do or say in a merely natural state. This should be the abiding experience of all believers.

Verse 19—“Speaking... singing and making melody in your heart.” This verse brings to us what is called congregational worship. Of course, it may be applied to the individual as such, but has a fuller meaning when a number of Christians come together. At that time they express real worship as they give utterance to the praises that well up in their hearts. Psalms may refer definitely to those found in Holy Scripture, though not necessarily so. Any ascription of praise is a psalm. Hymns are expressions of worship addressed directly to the Deity. Spiritual songs are those that relate to spiritual experiences. Notice that the melody is to be predominantly in the heart.

Verse 20—“Giving thanks, always for all things.” The true worshiper recognizes the goodness of God in every detail of life, and therefore can thank Him even for those things that are hard to endure and harder to understand, for he knows that all are working together for good (Rom. 8:28).

Verse 21—“Submitting yourselves one to another.” There can only be true fellowship in worship and service as we seek the good of all, and selfishness is judged in the light of the grace of God, as seen in the cross.

The Heart of the Lesson

Both the passages discussed emphasize fitness for service, but also suggest the importance of spiritual worship, which is, in itself, something far higher and much more important than the most devoted service. In fact, all true service should spring from the spirit of worship. It is as we are occupied with God Himself, as revealed in Christ, that we are fitted to do His will in a scene of contrariness where the world, the flesh and the Devil are all arrayed against us.

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