

THE SERAPHIM AND THE COAL

A difficult aspect of becoming a son of God is learning what it takes to feel comfortable in the presence of the Father.

In the first chapter of Ezekiel, the prophet had a mighty vision. He saw the Lord, high and lifted up and His train, that part of His robe where His victories were recorded, filled the temple. The Lord was guarded by seraphim which protected Him from the unclean. One seraphim cried out "The whole Earth is full of His glory", and the sound of it shook the temple. The prophet was afraid and cried out in fear because he was unclean in the presence of the Holy. A seraphim then flew and brought a coal from the altar to lay upon his lips, purge them, and take away his iniquity. This coal came off the altar of incense, representing prayer.

At a general conference we once attended, we saw the Lord high and lifted up. Thousands were worshiping God and He came to inhibit the praises of His people. He filled the stadium with power. We watched the Spirit sweep over the assembly in waves. When it came to the place where we were standing, we could feel the hair on our heads blown back. We got a taste of the worship around the throne of God described in Revelations. In the literal presence of God, we were afraid. We found ourselves on our knees crying holy unto the Lord. He came and purged our lips, giving us a better language to use in His presence.

Feeling unclean in the presence of God is neither unusual or uncommon. When Peter saw the glory of God, he felt unworthy and asked Jesus to depart. Job said that since he had seen God, he abhorred himself. Daniel's comeliness was turned to corruption. After God revealed Himself on the road to Damascus, Paul could not shake off the conviction that he was the chiefest of sinners. John the Revelator fell at His feet as if he were dead. Even our righteousness becomes like filthy rags in the presence of His holiness.

In Eden, when man had no corruption, being in the presence of God was not uncomfortable. All that Adam named in the presence of God was holy until he sinned. Then a cherubim with a flaming sword was placed at the entry to the garden to keep him away from it. On one side of Adam's sin was peace and harmony with the animals in coexistence. On the other of his sin, after the flood, the lamb would come to fear the lion. Where before, Adam had walked and talked with God, after sinning, he fell on his face in fear before God. Just as we draw away, knowing we are not fit to stand before Him.

Until the time of Christ, cherubim were used to separate the holy from the unclean. Their images were even sewn into the veil that separated the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt, from the rest of the temple. After His death, that veil was split in two. Now we have access through the veil of His flesh into His presence. The way in is straight and narrow, much like the head of the spear that pierced His side. But having the right to enter does not give us the courage. For that, we need something safe to hide beneath. Blood, for example. That is why we go first to the altar of repentance. We have been given the right through baptism to ask that our sins be put under His blood. If we ask, He is faithful and just to forgive us. Then, with the blood of His mercy shielding us from His judgment, we can come before Him. No seraphim are needed.

Purging by fire still works. On Mount Carmel, fire falling from heaven on the sacrifice of Elijah was a sign of acceptance of what was being offered. The blood representing the sins of Israel was laid on the mercy seat as a shield to protect the people from God's judgment as He looked from His

abode between the wings of the cherubim to His copy of their covenant contained within the Ark. The acceptance of the blood on the mercy seat was also signified by fire from heaven. Fire fell in a different form on the day of Pentecost to consume living sacrifices. That fire cleanses. That fire purges and makes holy that which is unclean. Even lips that were previously unworthy, to speak the language of Heaven.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of anyone that you would love to spend time with, except for the fact that you would be uncomfortable or intimidated by being in their company?
2. Were the events that the prophet was experiencing real or symbolic? If it was a vision, what do you think the coal represented?
3. Do you feel that the power or presence of God is stronger when there are larger numbers of people worshipping Him together?
4. How do you respond when you know without a doubt that you are in the presence of God?
5. The description of the worship around the throne in Revelations does not seem to include any elements of fear. Do you think the fear that most people feel in the presence of the holy on the earth is because our bodies are mortal? Remember God's response to Moses' request to see Him? That he could not see God and live?
6. Is there anything that you can do under your own power to make yourself more presentable to come into the presence of God?
7. What kind of corruption do you think was introduced into Adam's body after his transgression that ended his immortality? Or do you think his body was already subject to a physical death that was held in check by the presence of God?
8. Why do you think the cherubim was placed at the entrance to the garden of Eden? Do you think the garden and cherubim are still there?
9. If Adam was immortal before he sinned, and the sin introduced death into his body and made him mortal, would that explain his sudden fear about coming into the presence of God?
10. What is it about righteous blood being between us and God that makes it safe for mortals to be in His presence? What is atonement?
11. How do we know when the sacrifice of our bodies to His service, our living sacrifice, has been accepted?