

## On The Mercy Of The Court

How do you see yourself? I'm not talking about that person that you present to your neighbor. I'm not talking about that person who your girlfriend sees. I'm talking about that person with whom you carry on the most intimate and secret of conversations ... you. How do you see yourself?

I think about Isaiah the prophet. I have no doubt that before he was called to be a prophet he was a good man. More than that, he, as far as I know was a faithful Hebrew, faithful to his fathers and to the law. The Hebrew people of Isaiah's sort of remind me of Robert Burns poem, To A Louse. They looked at the people and nations round about them and saw all their defilement and filth, but because they had Jerusalem (God's city), the Temple (God's house) and they were God's special people, they could not (would not) see their own defilement. They felt themselves above defilement. But they weren't. In fact, Isaiah's prophecy was, in part to tell them just how defiled they had become. "Dress up like you will, but you are still defiled," God tells them. The lady in Burn's poem is like that. Dressed in all her finery at church she still had lice. The poem is hard to read, but here it is.

Robert Burns

Poem lyrics of To a Louse by Robert Burns.  
On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church

Ha! whare ye gaun' ye crowlin ferlie?  
Your impudence protects you sairly;  
I canna say but ye strunt rarely  
Owre gauze and lace,  
Tho faith! I fear ye dine but sparely  
On sic a place.

Ye ugly, creepin, blastit wonner,  
Detested, shunn'd by saunt an sinner,  
How daur ye set your fit upon her--  
Sae fine a lady!  
Gae somewhere else and seek your dinner  
On some poor body.

Swith! in some beggar's hauffet squattle;  
There ye may creep, and sprawl, and sprattle;  
Wi' ither kindred, jumping cattle;  
In shoals and nations;  
Whare horn nor bane ne'er daur unsettle  
Your thick plantations.

Now haud you there! ye're out o' sight,  
Below the fatt'rils, snug an tight,  
Na, faith ye yet! ye'll no be right,  
Till ye've got on it--

The vera tapmost, tow'rin height  
O' Miss's bonnet.

My sooth! right bauld ye set your nose out,  
As plump an grey as onie grozet:  
O for some rank, mercurial rozet,  
Or fell, red smeddum,  
I'd gie you sic a hearty dose o't,  
Wad dress your droddum!

I wad na been surpris'd to spy  
You on an auld wife's flainen toy  
Or aiblins some bit duddie boy,  
On's wyliecoat;  
But Miss's fine Lunardi! fye!  
How daur ye do't?

O Jeany, dinna toss your head,  
An set your beauties a' abroad!  
Ye little ken what cursed speed  
The blastie's makin!  
Thae winks an finger-ends, I dread,  
Are notice takin!

O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
An foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an gait wad lea'es us,  
An ev'n devotion!

Back to Isaiah. In Isaiah 6 Isaiah saw a vision of God. Now remember, Isaiah was not a bad man. He was a faithful Hebrew. He worshiped at the Temple. He most likely was not a thief, a murderer, or an abuser of other people. He no doubt felt real good about himself when He looked in the mirror. God wanted him, however, to see himself from a different perspective. This vision is God telling Isaiah to look at yourself from God's perspective.

***Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:***

***“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”***

***4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the***

***Lord of hosts!”***

***6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”*** [Holy Bible, English Standard Version]

Do you see what happened here. Isaiah, for the first time, saw himself as God saw him. He was highly disturbed. He thought he was holy, he thought he was godly, he thought he was righteous and just. Then he saw the holiness, godliness, righteousness and justice of God and, well, in his own words, ***“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”*** Without God’s help, without God’s cleansing power, even as good as he was, he was lost, destroyed, undone. I can imagine that came as a great surprise to Isaiah. I like what Isaiah did in light of that. He did not stiffen his back and say, “I’m not a sinner. How dare you call me a sinner! I’m a Hebrew and a good one at that. I’m better than those unfaithful Hebrews and I’s especially better than those Canaanites, Babylonians and Assyrians.” No, he recognized the holiness of God and therefore his own unholiness. He recognized that he could not be with God in his current condition. He recognized his need of mercy and cleansing.

In the New Testament there is a story that Jesus told that illustrates this point and need. It’s the story of the Pharisee and the Publican (Tax Collector). The Pharisee was one of those people that believed he was holy due to his birthright and goodness. He was too holy to be in the presence of such lowly people like the pitiful tax collector that stood not far from him. Here’s the story as Jesus told it.

***Luke 18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*** [Holy Bible, English Standard Version]

Do you see the difference in these two men? They saw great differences in themselves. The publican knew he could not be like the Pharisee. He knew what he was. He knew what he needed, so he goes to God and with beaten breasts he asks for it - MERCY. The Pharisee knew what he was, too. He was righteous, pure, holy, better than everybody else; just ask him, he’ll tell you. But that’s not what God saw. What God saw was another man in need of mercy. He would not receive it, however, because he did not see his own need. He believed that he deserved his fellowship with God and would not find himself begging for it.

I don’t think there is anything unclear about the application of this parable to you and me. I hope you will be with us Sunday so that we can prayerfully study this text together and pray about it so that we can go home justified by the mercy of God.

