

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## THIS TRAIN

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Have you ever read the scripture and misunderstood what it meant? It's easy to do, especially when you are a young Christian and your overall Bible knowledge is limited. It is also easy to do when you don't have fellowship with older Christians who will correct you. As a young Christian I had a moment when I made quite a basic error. It wasn't so much an error in theology and it did quite encourage me for a time, but on reflection I realised I was probably wrong.

This is what I read, in the book of Isaiah chapter 6 "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple"

Now you have to understand that I was quite keen on trains, I travelled on them whenever and wherever I could, I took photos of them, and I confess that I also wrote down the numbers. I even had a model railway at one time and I was quite excited at the prospect of getting to ride on a train that many others wouldn't, maybe God would even let me drive this train.

You see my misunderstanding came from not appreciating that there is more than one meaning of the word `train`. The picture I had in my head was wrong, but the problem is that once you have an idea in your head it's hard to get out. You might wonder how on earth I could have had such a crazy idea, that it is blindingly obvious that I was wrong. Surely this is such a bizarre idea that I couldn't really have seriously believed this was true?

Well clearly this is an obvious error which was, thankfully, quickly corrected. The `train` that was being referred to was the extended hem of God's robe, in fact other translations, but sadly not the one that I had, add the word `of His robe`, to avoid readers making the mistake that I did. Today we are more

familiar with this sort of train being a part of a brides dress, but in Isaiah's time it was much more a part of a king's robe. Cloth was not cheap in those days, especially the high quality cloth used in royal robes, and to use so much in one garment indicated the wealth and importance of the wearer. Here Isaiah is picturing God with a train so large that it fills the temple. His readers would have been quite aware of the size of the earthly Temple, and could, therefore imagine just how much magnificent this garment was.

It is impossible, with our limited understanding, to comprehend the fullness of God, so God helps us out sometimes by describing Himself in limited ways so that we can just about understand. In this case the picture of the train of His robe visualises it so massively greater than anything that would have ever been seen on an earthly king. It is shown like this to express His indescribable glory, His wealth and His power. Although this picture is considerably less than the reality of God's power, it does convey an awesome truth about God's greatness.

It also reminds us of God's healing power. You see there is another time in scripture which involved the hem of God's robe. In this case the robe belonged to Jesus and this story can be found in the Gospel of Luke.

"As Jesus went out, He was surrounded by the crowd. A woman in the crowd had suffered for 12 years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of His robe. Immediately the bleeding stopped.

'Who touched me?' Jesus asked. Everyone denied it, and Peter said 'Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you'

But Jesus said 'Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt the power go out from me'. When the woman realised that she could not stay hidden she began to tremble and fell to her knees in front of Jesus. The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched Him, and that she had been immediately healed. 'Daughter' He said to her 'Your faith has made you well. Go in peace'"

The woman in this story was desperate, and she knew that she needed to be close to Jesus, so close in fact, that she could touch the hem of His robe. The robe itself did not hold any special power, as Jesus explained, it was the faith of the woman that made her well. But that faith required her to get close to Jesus. Our faith is no different. We may not be suffering with constant bleeding, like the woman was, but as long as we remain away from Jesus, our sin is bleeding the life out of us.

To have any hope of spending eternity with God we must walk closely enough with Jesus that we can touch the hem of His garments. Whilst we are still here on earth we will be subject to temptations and failings, we will still do things wrong, there will be days when we let God down but there will never be a day when God cannot forgive us. We have the assurance, through Jesus, that we will, one day be in the presence of God the Father, and to touch the train of His robe. Once in His presence our healing will be complete, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more sin.

Although not related to the scripture in Isaiah there is a musical tradition amongst African Americans that mixes the message of the Gospel with trains. In the late 1800's many African Americans embraced the good news about Jesus and, at the same time, they also saw that the newly constructed railroads offered an opportunity to ride to the big cities and, hopefully, to a better life. These two ideas, of a better life now, and a better life in eternity, gave rise to many songs, one of which was called "This train". Although its origin is uncertain, we do know that it was first recorded in 1922 and in 1939 became a hit for a gospel singer called Sister Rosetta Tharpe, although it has been recorded by at least 40 other artists since.

The song opens with the lines "This train is bound for glory" and then "If you ride it you must be Holy" The singer was telling people that it was possible for anybody to join the train. But later verses tell us there are some people who can't ride the train "No Liars" "No Gamblers" "No hypocrites" "No Rustlers" "No hustlers". The song was a simple way of teaching people that there were a number of popular vices that were prevalent at the time and that if you wanted to get to heaven you should avoid them, because if you didn't you wouldn't be getting on the train to heaven. The ticket to ride this train is only available from Jesus, and it is only available if you are close enough to touch the hem of His robe.

I expect God found it quite funny that I should have misunderstood the scripture in the way I did. Perhaps when I get to heaven I will find that God has indeed set aside a heavenly train just for my use, or maybe my heavenly dwelling will be shaped like an old railway carriage.

Well probably not but one thing I do know is that I can ride the Gospel train all the way. It is a fantastic journey, and I would like it very much if you would join me for the ride.



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