

God's Call to Men
by John Roach Straton

“Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.” Proverbs 8:4

“Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.” Gen. 12:1,2

As we look out upon the marvelous world in which we live, one fact must impress the thoughtful observer above all others - matchless order and system everywhere. The whole great machine that we call the universe seems to move with a precision and accuracy that is staggering to the finite mind. Night follows day, the seasons succeed each other, the planets hold to their appointed ways, and the earth swings around its orbit without variation.

In the realm of chemistry and physics, the same unvarying system is discovered. The minutest particle of matter moves in its appointed place with the same marvelous accuracy that characterizes the wheeling planets above our heads.

What does all this mean? It manifestly means, for one thing, that God has a mission and a designed place for every atom of matter and every ounce of physical force in the entire universe.

What a marvelous thought that infinite Wisdom and Divine Love have planned all things and that the whole vast universe is going forward in its appointed mission because it is all the result of wise and holy design!

A PURPOSE FOR EVERY LIFE

These things being true, it must follow that God has a purpose and a plan for every human life and that He calls us to fulfill that plan.

To the ancient Hebrew, Wisdom was a personification of the invisible spiritual God, just as the divine eternal Logos, Christ, was a manifestation of God. This chapter from Proverbs, therefore, and the beginning of the first chapter of John’s Gospel, are very similar in setting for the creative activities of God, through Wisdom, as expressed under the old dispensation and through the ever-living Christ, as expressed in the new. It is God, therefore, who is regarded as speaking in the words of our text and saying, “Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man.”

God summons us, just as He summoned Abraham, for the fulfillment of His wise and loving plans for our lives. Since God’s wisdom is behind all of the material universe and since He plans out the activity even of every material atom in His

world, we must know that God has a purpose and a plan for every human life.

It is unthinkable that God should have created the material world in perfect harmony and order, to fulfill a designed and wise end, and that He should give care and thought to the activity of every material thing, yet that He should not exercise care for man, the crown of creation and for whom all material things evidently exist.

Yes, we must believe that God has a plan for each of our lives.

We do not always know in the beginning, nor see clearly, just what that plan or purpose is. When God called Abraham, He said to him, "Go out to the land that I will show thee." God had the plan for Abraham's life, even though Abraham himself could not see the future.

Sometimes the ships of our Navy are sent out with sealed orders. That is, they are told to go to a certain place in the ocean, and when that point is reached, the captain is directed to open the envelope and to read his orders. God often deals with us in that way, and it is the part of faith to act, whether we can see the full plan or not.

When David was going out to meet Goliath, he did not pick up the stones for his sling until he was almost in the presence of the giant. God had called him and David answered, knowing that God would give him all things needful for his success.

We need today the blessed and heartening consciousness that our lives are being planned for us by omniscient Love. We are not homeless waifs, in a fatherless world. Each one of us is an object of divine solicitude and heavenly care. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of God, we are taught; and if we would be more prayerful and earnest in seeking our place and calling in life, there would be fewer failures and more happiness and peace.

God has a plan for every man, and He calls us to the realization of that plan. It makes no difference how much surface success there may be; unless we find the mission God has laid out for us, our lives are dismal failures at last.

THE CALL TO HIGH CHARACTER

We need to understand, however, that there is something better in life than the mere practical tasks by which we earn our daily bread. God not only called Abraham to the realization of a practical mission in life; but He also called him to a high, holy and useful character.

It has been well said that we are here not merely to make a living but to make a life. So the mysterious whisperings of the divine voice sounded for Abraham.

When this call came to him, he was in the midst of the luxury and ease of a great selfish civilization. The Chaldeans attained to a high degree of culture there in the Mesopotamian valley, and everything that life could give was Abraham's for the asking. He belonged to a strong family, with ample wealth to enable him to live in ease and comfort, if he had so desired. But God's voice came to him, saying, "Come out!" There is something higher and better for you than this, O Abraham! Come to the wilderness and find God and serve Him, and you will attain to the heights of glory!"

But we are living in a very practical and rather skeptical age, and we are much inclined today to doubt concerning these great spiritual realities. We tend to ask, "Does God still speak to men in this fashion?" Some of us tend to think that all these things belong to the past and to what we call "the age of miracles", so we ask, "What have we to do with such things?"

Ah, my friends, believe me, these things do not belong only to the past. To the ready and listening soul God still speaks. The things that are seen are temporal. It is the things that are not seen that are eternal.

The trouble with many of our conclusions in this age of rationalism and intellectual pride is that our premises are so frequently false. If premises are correct, then we can draw truthful conclusions. But if the premises are founded in error, then the more perfect the logic, the greater the untruth at last.

We need a new vision of the Spirit today. We need a greater reliance upon the insight of God.

For Heaven still speaks and says, "Be still and know that I am God."

I walk down the Valley of Silence,
Down the dim voiceless valley alone,
And I hear not the fall of a footstep around me,
Save God's and my own;
And the hush of my heart is as holy
As hovers where angels have flown.

Do you ask what I find in the Valley?
'Tis my trysting place with the Divine.
And I fell at the feet of the Holy
And above me a voice said: "Be Mine."
And there arose from the depths of my spirit
An echo, "My heart shall be Thine."

But far on the deep there are billows
That never shall break on the beach,

And I have heard songs in the silence
That never shall float into speech
And I have had dreams in the Valley
Too lofty for language to reach

And I have seen thoughts in the Valley,
Ah, me, how my spirit was stirred!
And they wear holy veils on their faces.
Their footsteps can scarcely be heard.
They pass through the Valley like virgins,
Too pure for the touch of a word.

Do you ask me the place of the Valley,
Ye hearts that are harrowed by care?
It lieth afar between mountains,
And God and His angels are there
And one is the dark mount of sorrow
And one the bright mountain of prayer.

But not alone to the poet does God speak today. To all men who will hear and heed, the divine voice comes, calling us away from the groveling, selfish and low, up to the heights of nobler thought and higher achievement.

GOD CALLS THROUGH THE GLORIES OF HIS CREATION

In many ways God is seeking to speak His message to our hearts and to call us out to our best possible self.

For one thing, God speaks to us through the beauties and glories of nature. The Hebrew psalmist, in the rapture of his soul, exclaimed, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Mrs. Browning, from the depths of devout faith, said:

Earth is crammed with Heaven and every common bush is aflame with God. Some years ago I was walking one evening beside the ocean on Tybee Island in Georgia.

It was a perfect night. The moon was shining in matchless brilliance - as the Greek poet happily phrased it: "Like a beautiful shepherdess leading forth her flock of stars." The tide was at the full. The great waves, one beyond the other, were rolling in like charging cavalry, to break in thunder upon the shore. And as they broke, they crested up, each one of them crowned with fleecy whiteness, as delicate and dainty in the moonlight as the finest lace. As far along the golden sands as my straining eyes could reach, these great waves shimmered in snowy whiteness beneath the moon.

On the landward side of this picture, the sand dunes rolled away, the dark pine

forests farther inland stood solemnly against the skyline, and the majestic charm of the star-bejeweled night was over it all.

I stood there all alone, lost in wonder and my soul lifted in reverence by the matchless beauty on every side - the beauty of the forest, the beauty of the glowing heavens, the beauty of the golden shores, and the indescribable majesty and glory of the mighty ocean!

As I looked with reverent wonder upon it all, I noticed suddenly an unusual cloud hanging low upon the horizon line just above the sea. It was the only cloud in the sky; and, strange to say, it was in the exact shape of a human hand, with its index finger pointing upward. So I took to my heart its message and said, Yes, it is true! All of this majesty and beauty of the world around us does point upward to God. The splendor of sunsets, the witchery of dawns, the majesty of snowcapped mountains, the rolling vastness of the mighty deep, the thundering charge of the tempest, and the soft sighing of the summer breeze - all speak to us of God and call us to make our lives beautiful and harmonious with the home that the Heavenly Father has given us!

My friends, is it possible to imagine a greater tragedy than a sordid, selfish, unlovely life in the midst of the world of perfect beauty?

GOD CALLS THROUGH THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Again, God goes further in His effort to challenge our attention and to woo us to the highest things of life. He sets before us examples of "the beauty of holiness". He speaks to us through other lives. By all the forces of influence He calls us to come up higher.

It is said that, when Stanley went to Africa to search for Livingstone, he was an unbeliever; but when he came back from Africa, he was a humble follower of the divine Christ. His contact with the great soul of Livingstone - that man of piety and of prayer - had been the means by which God had unstopped his ears and called him to salvation. He could not stay in the presence of such heroic holiness as that exemplified by Livingstone without hearing, like a trumpet call, the challenge of that life to his own.

Mr. Spurgeon has told us an incident, wonderfully illustrating the fact of God's call to one life through another.

He was planning to hold services in the Crystal Palace of London. He went with a friend one morning, before the meetings started, to test the acoustics of the building. He stood upon the platform, repeating verses of Scripture as his friend stood in the rear of the hall to see whether he could be heard with ease.

He stood there and repeated several verses: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his holy begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not

perish, but have everlasting life,” and, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Then his friend rejoined him. They went away, not knowing that any human ear had heard.

But some years later when Spurgeon was holding revival services in another city, he opened one of the meetings for testimony one night. A man came down the aisle and said, “I should like you to hear my testimony. I have a very remarkable story to tell. Some of you may have difficulty in believing it, yet it happened precisely as I shall relate.”

Then he told the great audience that he was a tinner by profession, and that years before he was working upon the roof of the Crystal Palace in London. He was at a great moral crisis in his life. A terrible temptation was before him - a temptation that would have proved him a traitor to his home and his marriage vows. He said he was struggling with the temptation as he worked one morning there upon the top of the Crystal Palace and was about making up his mind that he would do the sin that was inviting him.

But suddenly, as he was struggling with himself over the matter, there came to him a voice of marvelous sweetness, as he thought, the voice of an angel, repeating verses of Scripture: “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” and, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

And there, beneath the open sky, sobered and thrilled by the strange voice that he thought had come to him from Heaven, the man said he kneeled, surrendered his heart and life to God, and accepted the invitation of Christ to come to Him and find rest.

From that day onward he had rejoiced in the keeping and saving power of our blessed Lord.

When he had finished his testimony, Mr. Spurgeon arose, moved with profound emotion, and told the sequel to the story. He related how he had gone that morning into the Crystal Palace only to test the acoustics of the building, not having any knowledge that a needy soul was hearing the Scriptures quoted, as the very voice of God, which proved powerful unto salvation. So the great preacher and his convert, before that multitude, rejoiced together and praised God!

“Unto you, O men, do I call; and my voice is unto the sons of man.” There is, at last, my friends, no meaning to human life until we hear the voice of God and heed His summons to step out into the fullness of usefulness and power that He ever stands willing and ready to bestow.

GOD CALLS THROUGH PROVIDENCE

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God has so ordered our lives upon this planet that the events which enter into our experiences profoundly affect us, either drawing us toward the higher life or driving us toward the lower. In a real sense, therefore, God speaks to us through all of the providences that enter our lives. High and successful achievements, every increase of temporal welfare or money, ought to be interpreted by us as a summons from God to higher living and to nobler endeavor.

One of the saddest facts of human life is that so few people can stand prosperity. It is the smooth ice upon which we slip, and very often men and women make the very blessings of life an occasion for spiritual decline. Instead, however, they ought to be a challenge to spiritual progress. How grateful we should be to God for the blessings He has showered upon us, and we should hear His loving voice calling us to come up higher.

Through the darker and sterner providences of life, God also calls us. Judgment is always for healing more than for punishment. The time of judgment is ever a time of growth. Even the terrible judgment of the World War did not bring the world to abiding repentance. The Versailles Conference was a selfish scramble among the victors in the war for place and power; but it did not bring real peace, and the agony of the race has continued, with heavy judgments falling upon the children of men. Then the Washington Disarmament Conference came, and the leaders of the nations were willing to pray. They refused definitely to open the Versailles Conference with prayer, but progress was indicated by the fact that those representative statesmen from the great nations of the earth had grown willing to bow before God and to cry to Him for help. Yes, out of judgment ever flows blessing.

This is not to say that God sends into our lives, necessarily, all of the darker experiences that enter them; but we can say that He will overrule every event for our better good, if we will only hear His voice and heed His counsel. Truly does the Word of God teach us:

“No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Heb. 12:11

How many wonderful illustrations in history and in human lives have we had of the purifying power of God ministered through adversity and suffering!

Charles Crittendon has told us the story of his conversion, that thereby God might be glorified and the blessedness of His truth more fully understood by the people. He told us how, while a successful businessman here in New York, a millionaire, enjoying every comfort and ease that money could buy, he was a saved man but, as he frankly confessed, not really dedicated Christian. The church was simply a good, decent institution what was worthy of support, and he

gave it some nominal perfunctory cooperation; but he had no active interest in the service of God's great kingdom through the church.

Then he tells us how his little daughter Florence - his only child - was stricken with sickness and for weeks lingered, growing frailer and weaker all the while. She was the idol of his heart and the center of his life's ambition.

He brought to New York the greatest doctors that money could employ; yet the disease baffled all their skill.

He tells us how, at the close, he could not bear her out of his sight. He held her frail, wasted little body upon a large pillow on his own knee until, at last, despite the doctor's efforts and the solicitude of friends, she was called away and he was left brokenhearted.

So bitter was his grief that his reason almost tottered upon its throne. Every day for a month he went to her grave to carry flowers and to fall prostrate upon the ground in his agony.

On one of these days, however, he was again pouring out his grief at her grave, he tells us, when a voice came to him, Florence is not here; her poor form of clay rests beneath this sod, but Florence has gone to God. And you now, O Charles Crittendon, must walk in the Godward way.

Up from the ground he arose with peace and comfort in his heart for the first time.

He went out from that day into his wonderful career of Christian service and philanthropy. He surrendered his business connections and devoted his fortune entirely to works of good. He went over the earth preaching the Gospel of God's love and establishing everywhere the Florence Crittendon Homes for fallen women.

Thus it was that God's great voice came to him through his sorrow. And the Heavenly Father overruled that dark providence to bless mankind. If these things had not thus transpired, doubtless it would have meant simply another successful businessman who would eat, drink and be merry to the end of his days, and another society girl to dream and dance and spend a useless life; but through the marvelous providence of an infinitely wise and loving God, even the shadow was turned into brightness, and gladness was brought out of gloom.

GOD CALLS THROUGH CONSCIENCE AND HIS WORD

God's voice comes to us also through His holy Word. The sacred Scriptures are a trumpet call from God to man. Through them the Divine summons us and says, "My son, give me thine heart." "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man."

Coleridge said he knew the Bible was true because it reached him “at a deeper depth than any other book.” That was but another way of saying that God called him through the pages of His holy Word.

What a transforming influence these pages have upon all our lives! And how we should thank God, with humble faith and with minds and hearts attuned to the message of pardon and grace and final glory, that the Holy Spirit, through the Word, is seeking ever to speak God’s truth to our listening ears!

And what doom we rightfully deserve if we stop our ears and refuse to hear; for God not only calls us through these external things, through the beauties and wonders of nature and His revelation of Himself through the Book, but He has set also within our hearts a sounding board which we call conscience.

Whatever creed be taught or land be trod Man’s conscience is the oracle of God.

In almost every act we perform through life, in almost every thought that we allow to enter the temple of our souls, God speaks to us through this inner monitor and says, “Do this and you shall prosper; do that and you shall suffer.”

It is as though He sought to leave us utterly without excuse. It is as though He had said to us, “Though you refuse to hear My voice through Nature and even through My Word, you cannot refuse to hear it through conscience in the secret place of your own soul.”

Who can look upon Christ on the cross without conscience commanding that we follow Him?

Our dim eyes ask a beacon, and our weary feet a guide,

And our hearts of all life’s mysteries seek the meaning and the key;

And a cross gleams o’er our pathway, on it hangs the Crucified,

And He answers all our yearnings by the whisper, “Follow Me!”