

# "SINCE I MET YOU, GOD"

Text: Isaiah 55:6

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The passage in Isaiah, which begins with the words: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near" is an Old Testament classic on repentance and forgiveness. The greatest thing that can happen to a man is when he truly meets God. There is a sense in which God is always near, but in the life of every individual there are "times of His visitation."

Isaiah would stress the fact that God is actively seeking man, but man must stir himself to take hold of God. Is this not the meaning of the words of Isaiah: "And there is none that calleth upon thy name that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." (Isaiah 64:7) "Let the wicked man forsake his way" represents a thoroughly evangelical emphasis upon repentance and forgiveness: Even the words "wicked" and "the unrighteous" are very modern applications. The wicked are the godless who are so immersed in their own affairs that they do not recognize God's claims on them. The unrighteous are men of falsehood and faithlessness- and every sinner is faithless to his obligations to God.

Robert E. Luccock wrote a book whose title "IF GOD BE FOR US" is suggested by the words of Paul to the Romans: "If God be for us, who can be against us." (Romans 8:31) He begins his first chapter with the proposition that man cannot run away from the presence of God. There is no darkness in which we can hide. The greatest darkness this world has ever known was the darkness of Calvary and even that darkness was not too great for God. Jesus passed through that darkness when He cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But He trusted God beyond the darkness, when He said: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit", and these were the words of someone who in the darkness had been holding fast to God.

It is wonderful how God can be found even in the darkness of war. One of the most wonderful poems ever written, one written by an unknown soldier in the midst of battle, goes like this:

"Look, God, I have never spoken to You;  
But now I want to say, how do You do?  
You see, God, they told me you didn't exist  
And like a fool, I believed all this.  
Last night from a shell-hole I saw your sky...  
I figured right then, they had told me a lie.  
Had I taken the time to see the things you made,  
I'd known they weren't calling a spade a spade.  
I wonder, God, if You'd shake my hand?  
Somehow, I feel that You will understand.  
Funny, I had to come to this hellish place  
Before I had time to see Your face.

Well, I guess there isn't much more to say  
But I'm glad, God, I met you today.  
I guess the zero hour will soon be here  
But I'm not afraid since I know You're near.  
The signal- well, God- I'll have to go;  
I like you lots, this I want you to know.  
Look, now, this will be a horrible fight.  
Who knows- I may come to Your house tonight.  
Though I wasn't friendly with You before,  
I wonder, God, if you'd wait at Your door?  
Look- I'm crying- me shedding tears,  
I wish I had known you these many years.  
Well, I will have to go now, God, goodbye.  
Strange- since I've met You- I'm not afraid to die!"

Many of us can reach the words spoken by the soldier boy in the midst of the battle. Things have been different since we met God.

## **I. SINCE I MET YOU, GOD, I KNOW YOUR FORGIVENESS.**

When a man first meets God he realizes that sin is a colossal defect deep within his soul. Sin is a situation so incurable by the efforts of man as to be humanly impossible of realization. Sin is a malady, which calls for extreme and profound treatment. As such, the situation calls for the Great Physician.

The next step toward forgiveness is to realize that sin in its ultimate sense is a sin against God, and it is from God that ultimate forgiveness must come. No wonder David cried out: "Against Thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight," Psalm 51:4.

As a sinner I was guilty of three great basic sins, the sin of insurrection, the sin of ingratitude, and the sin of insult. As a sinner I was guilty of insurrection, because I was a rebel, and I brazenly defied the sovereign authority of God. As a sinner I was guilty of ingratitude. I sinned against a God who made me, preserved me and blessed me. As a sinner I added the sin of insult. When I sinned against God I made self an idol at which I worshiped instead of giving God the worship that belonged to him.

The day that I met God in forgiveness I realized what my sin cost God. I came at last to Calvary and I saw what my sin did- what sin always does. It crucified the love of God~ It was a wonderful day when I realized the length, the breadth, the height and the depth of God's love for me.

The realization of this love brought me into full fellowship. This is the true meaning of forgiveness. This is what the Prodigal son learned. When he came home in repentance, the Father threw his arms around him, brought him into the house, and restored him. He did not come back to disgrace, isolation, or probation. The father loved him as if no separation ever occurred. No forgiveness is complete without acceptance.

Dr. Walter M. Horton tells of the young woman who was rushed to the hospital because she had been stabbed in a drunken brawl. There was a general feeling that it was only a matter of time before death came to her. A lovely young Christian nurse stood looking at the young victim. Suddenly the dying girl opened her eyes, and then said to the nurse: "I want you to tell me something and tell me straight. Do you think God cares about people like me?" The nurse, after a pause, replied: "I'm telling you straight. God cares about you and he forgives you, if you will accept His forgiveness." Something happened in that hospital room, the same thing that happened on a battlefield to the young man who wrote the poem. It is something that has to do with what happened on a green hill outside the city wall. Through the forgiveness of God, peace came to that dying girl. She knew the wonder of forgiveness. She could die, whispering: "Since I met you, God, I know your forgiveness!"

## **II. SINCE I MET YOU, GOD, I KNOW YOUR FRIENDLINESS.**

Jesus said: "I have called you friends."(1 John 15:15) One of the most wonderful things about meeting God is that you find in Him your greatest friend. Human friendliness is wonderful. A wise teacher of preachers once said that the greatest difference between preachers is not in preaching ability, or in scholarship, but in sheer friendliness. But infinitely greater is God's friendliness, which He manifests to those He has forgiven.

Christ has already proven his friendship. The florists say: "Say it with flowers." Jesus said it with thorns and spikes. The moment my heart overflows with gratitude and love I begin to realize His friendship. It is then He reveals Himself to me. It is possible to know much about the Bible, and yet not know intimately the Christ of the Bible!

So often we may doubt human love, but we cannot doubt God's love. Someone has said that there were 600 ways that Romeo might have told Juliet he loved her. And if he had used all 600 ways, I am sure Juliet would have said: "Now, Romeo, are you sure you love me?" But my Lord has already proven his love. "Greater love hath no man that this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

All of us need a friend. Otherwise life would be lonely. A boy in school was writing an essay on "Twins." He wrote these words: "I believe that the reason why there are so many twins born is because little children are frightened of entering the world alone." Isn't it wonderful that we can have a spiritual twin? Jesus is born as a twin to every individual who would accept Him. There is no need for anyone to be lonely in life, for Christ wants to be born again in your spiritual birth. From that moment you will never be alone again!

Since I met God I have rejoiced in the meaning of prayer as a part of that great friendship. Have you ever felt confused, frustrated, tied up in mental knots. Finally, you went to the phone and talked it all out with a human friend? Thank God, I have a built-in phone system! A popular ad in the 60's said: "We are close to you as your telephone:" God has graciously installed in my soul a spiritual phone. I can reach Him at any time! Or to change the figure of prayer as a telephone to that of a jet plane. The great Douglas Shynight is described with these words: "This plane is equipped with a radar system that locks the plane onto the target in the dark." Prayer is a spiritual radar system, which locks my soul onto the target, which is God and keeps me locked to the divine friend even in the dark.

This friendship is a transforming one. Dr. J. H. Jowett once conducted a wedding in a little village in England. A great London Organist was asked to play a little organ that seemed to have the asthma. It also had only one pedal. Yet, defective as the little organ was, the fingers of the great organist produced a wonderful wedding march. Think what the fingers of my friend, Jesus, can do in my life. As Gypsy Smith once said: "You let Christ come, with the fingers that painted the lily and the rosebud and the rainbow, the fingers that were once nailed to the cross, and let those fingers touch the keys of your life and see what happens!"

### **III. SINCE I MET YOU, GOD, I KNOW YOUR FEARLESSNESS**

Since I met God, I have lost my fear of tomorrow. Jesus said: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow." What he meant was "Do not be anxious about tomorrow." As the Interpreter's Bible explains: "This is a warning against borrowing trouble from the future> not a veto against wise planning."

Too many of us borrow trouble, and by this stupidity we drain away strength from today to waste it on tomorrow's fears that may never be fulfilled. I like to think how wonderfully wise God was to divide life into days and He brought down on each day "the curtain of night".

I still believe that one of the greatest promises is "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25), and we know this is true because "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut.33:27). These words have helped me to realize that God sustains me through every moment of my life. This realization calms my troubled soul and opens my heart to the strength of God.

Let me take you back to the last part of the poem from the battlefield. This young man hears the signal as the zero hour arrives. He knows that it may be a horrible fight, and that he may come to God's house that night. But what a fearlessness is his. "Strange- since I've met you- I'm not afraid to die."

I cannot help but compare the fearlessness of this modern soldier with the fearlessness of one of greatest soldiers of the Cross- the Apostle Paul. When Paul met Christ on the Damascus road, he knew God's forgiveness, God's friendliness, and God's fearlessness. In 2 Timothy 4:6, the old soldier says: "For I am now ready to be offered." I like Moffatt's translation: 'My time to go has come.' To Paul, death was a simple going home with a clear conscience and a clear conviction that faithfully he' had served His Lord to the end. When he added: "The time of my departure is at hand" he was using the figure of speech of the unmooring of a ship for a voyage overseas.

As I stood in that prison in Rome, I thought of Paul. No doubt he was in the Tullianum, the lower dungeon of the Maritime prison. The top dungeon was bad enough, but he was in a still more wretched place. Through an opening he had been lowered to the lower dungeon. Through that same opening came all the light and the air and the food that he received. I thought of Paul, shivering, blue with the cold. I imagined that I looked into his face with the little light available, and I thought, surely, Paul, you must be miserable and you must be melancholy. But I see his face radiant with the look of heaven. I thought of that last day. He must have heard shuffling of feet in the dungeon above. A cruel face looks down through the hole and says: "Come on, old man, Get yourself ready." Paul answered: "I am ready." He had been ready ever since the day he met Christ.

I journey with him in imagination the three miles out the Appian Way. There his placed on the last altar he would ever know on earth. One sharp, deep stroke, and Paul left the foul city of Rome to go to that beautiful city whose builder and maker is God. He left the malaria-infested climate of Rome to go to the finest climate in the entire universe, heaven's day of eternal beauty. He left King Nero, thick-necked, cruel eyed Nero, and when he opened his spiritual eyes he saw King Jesus, whose kingdom is love. He left behind eyes that for some time had been blinded, and now, in heaven he could see forever. And for all eternity he could see his blessed Lord, the One who had given him forgiveness, friendliness, and fearlessness!