

A HAND, A DOOR, AND A KNOCK

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(GENESIS 7: 10; REVELATION 3:20; MATTHEW 25:10-11)

I have often been asked, " If God knew that man would sin, why did He create him? " The question, however, presents only a negative approach to a vital theme. We might also ask, " If God knew that millions of men would find and enjoy eternal happiness, would He have been justified in not creating man because some people would choose unwisely? " There are two sides to every picture; and whatever we may decide concerning this problem, one thing remains indisputable -man was created. Furthermore, he was given a free will. Varying circumstances may influence him; strong pressure may be brought to bear upon him; but always, man has the power to choose. When we unite three Scriptures, this fact is plainly visible.

The Hand that Never Knocked

Noah's strange craft loomed against the blue sky, and around it, sightseers asked innumerable questions. Surely this Master-carpenter was a fool! He had worked without wages for many years. He apparently served an employer who neither came to see the job, nor remembered to send payment to the man who did it. Yet Noah continued his labours. When he took time off, he devoted it to preaching; and his message was the most fantastic story the people had ever heard. Probably they listened to the strange old man and decided he was good fun! When he rebuked their sin, they tolerated him; when he spoke of the holiness of God, they probably frowned and denied their sinfulness; when he said the time of retribution was at hand, they undoubtedly laughed him to scorn. When Noah's predictions came true, they were dumbfounded and overwhelmed; yet seven days of priceless opportunity elapsed between Noah's entering the ark and the fulfillment of his prophecy. If, during that period, any man had knocked in faith on the door of the ark, he would have been admitted.

The Hand that Always Knocks

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man will . . ." " If any man will . . ." Surely we may repeat an earlier statement-man has not changed. (i) They were very satisfied. They said, " We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Perhaps this was the secret of their folly. Few men can offset the challenge and temptation of prosperity. A nation is easier to reach in war than it is in peace-time; a man engulfed by poverty is more susceptible to the Gospel than a wealthy financier whose attitude proclaims to the world "he has need of nothing." (ii) They were very surprised. Surely it was inexcusable arrogance to say to such fine people, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." such statements were irresponsible: and thereby hangs profound truth. A man may measure himself against a mountain and feel a midget; the same man may measure himself against a mouse and feel a giant. Man's standards may pronounce him great; God's standards might reveal him to be small and useless. (iii) They were very stupid. The Lord Jesus was kept waiting at the door. Constantly He had knocked, seeking admission; but the "need of nothing " attitude had made the people complacently at ease. After all, they did not need Him; they were doing very well without Him. Poor Laodicea!

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The Hand that Knocked Too Late

When asked for signs of His return, the Lord Jesus spoke of ten virgins who went forth to meet a bridegroom. He said, "And five of them were wise, and five were foolish." They all heard the same message; to a degree they all shared the same desire-to be present at the forthcoming celebrations. They were different only in that five were so anxious about their reception that they were careful to attend to every detail necessary to ensure their readiness. The other five were contentedly at ease. They were neither fussy nor fearful. They fully expected to be there, and without any fear lay down to sleep. Their attitude said, "Please do not disturb us. We are fully aware of everything; we have need of nothing; when the bridegroom comes, we shall be as ready and as well-equipped as all others." The people of Noah's day, the citizens of Laodicea, and the five foolish virgins, appear to be strangely related-related to our generation. "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." They knocked on the door, but they knocked too late. Happy is that man who remembers: "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

The Negro's Testimony

Dr. Harry A. Ironside will long be remembered. His forthright messages, his living illustrations, and the manner in which he put these to his ever-widening audiences, revealed him to be outstanding as a preacher. It was no cause for amazement when crowds flocked to hear him; and everywhere one heard appreciations of his dynamic ministry. Among the choicest of his stories was one concerning a Negro who rose to give a testimony in a certain meeting. In his quaint but delightful manner the colored Christian praised the Lord for the grace that had found and reclaimed him. His language was colorful, and the majority of his listeners enthusiastic. However, the chairman of that service was not evangelistic in his outlook, and his liberal view of spiritual matters included a strong emphasis on man's part in working out God's salvation. He listened to the Negro's testimony, and as this continued, became rather restless-it seemed too one-sided in its emphasis. When the opportunity came, the chairman rose to say, "Our brother has only spoken of one side of the great picture. He has told us something of what God did; he has forgotten to add what he was required to do. When I became a Christian, I had to clean up my house, and do many things before I could even expect God to do anything. Brother," he added, as he turned to face the Negro, "didn't you find that was the case with you?" Dr. Ironside in telling the story would smile as he imitated the Negro, who instantly replied, "Yes, Sah, Ah clean done forgot. Ah didn't tell you 'bout my part, did I? Well, Ah did my part for over thirty years, running away from God as fast as evah my feet could carry me. That was my part. An' God took aftah me till He run me down. That was His part."

And that about sums it up. From Eden until Olivet, from Pentecost until the present time, God has always done the seeking. Eternal love for sinners guarantees that sooner or later He will arrive to knock at the door of a man's life, and say, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. . . . If any man will open the door ... I will come in. .

The Meeting in Hell

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My first pastor was the late Rev. Arthur Harries, whose ministry is still recalled in the mining valleys of Wales. He was an eloquent preacher of the Gospel, and probably did more to mould my young Christian life than any other. Some of his sermons, alas, were too deep for a boy's understanding; but as a man, he was superb. I have since discovered that one of his most effective illustrations came from The Biblical Treasury. Arthur Harries had an extensive library, and used it to good advantage.

A certain minister had been working hard preparing his sermon for the following Sunday, but in some strange way the essence of what he desired to say continued to elude him. His text was to be, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Suddenly he fell asleep, to dream that he had somehow reached the abyss in eternity. A meeting of demons was in session, and the problem of how best to seduce men was being debated with enthusiasm. One demon volunteered to go to earth to deceive the mind of man. He said, "I will tell them that the Bible is all wrong; that its stories are legendary; that it does not mean what it says." This idea was discarded, for the majority considered man to be too intelligent to accept such heresy. Then another demon offered to come to earth to say, "There is no God, no Saviour, no heaven, no hell." But again the offer was rejected, as it seemed highly problematical whether the majority of earthlings would accept the denial. The entire meeting seemed bewildered until one demon, wiser than his fellows, rose to say, "No; I will journey to the world of men and tell them that there is a God. I will tell them that there is a Saviour, and a heaven and a hell. Yes, I will assure them that this is all true; but then I will whisper in their ears that there is no need to hurry. I will tell them there is plenty of time; that they may enjoy the pleasures of sin first, and at some time in the future begin thinking of eternal things." And all the demons in hell rose to acclaim his wisdom-and then they sent him to earth!

"Mr. Powell," said a lady to me in New Zealand, "please pray for my husband. Unless something happens to rouse him, he'll die. He sits week after week thinking, thinking. He never goes out; he hardly eats, and sleep seems impossible. He says God called him to be a missionary. He maintains that God called him to full-time service; that he refused, stayed at home, and married, and now it's too late to do much about it. Please pray for him." I did, but what more could I do? The man was correct. It was too late.

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