

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“HERE AM I.”

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“The LORD called Samuel, and he answered, Here am I.”—1 Samuel iii. 4.

SAMUEL was a model child. He was the son of a prayerful mother. Hannah is one of the most notable pietists mentioned in the Scriptures. She possessed a truly original mind, but she was yet more famous for her piety,—a woman who knew how to take her griefs to the mercy-seat, and cast them upon her God. So Samuel came of a good stock; but “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and he would have been none the better for his godly parentage unless the Spirit of God had early in life renewed his heart. May our dear children all grow up as Samuel did; and, that they may do so, may they in their early life be such children as Samuel was!

It is to be noticed how obedient Samuel was to his guardian who stood to him in the place of a parent. We do not read of any disobedience or discourtesy to Eli; on the contrary, we see that the greatest respect and attention were paid by the child to the aged man who had the care of him. There is nothing in a child more beautiful than obedience; and a young Christian should be careful to keep his proper place, and the more he knows what his privileges are in being a child of God, the better should he fulfil his duty as a child at home.

The child Samuel was consecrated to God from his earliest days. His mother gave him to the Lord, and he himself confirmed the consecration. Happy is the child who is God's child, and who can say as truly as Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ.” Such grace is seen even in children; may it be seen in all the children of all the families connected with this church!

Samuel also had the great privilege of growing up amid holy services. He saw the daily sacrifices offered in the sanctuary, and

he was probably not absent from any of the means of grace of that day. Parents do their children grievous wrong when they do not suffer them to go with them to the house of prayer. I have noticed, when the showers are falling, that you, who try to keep a few pots of flowers in this smoky London, set them out to get the benefit of the rain; and you not only put out the large plants, but you put out the little ones too, so that the precious drops may fall on them. Let your little children, like the little pots of flowers, be put under the gracious showers of the sanctuary, and who knows how largely God may bless them? If children cannot understand all that is said, I think that, where the preaching is what it should be, even a small child will remember something, and perhaps understand it better by-and-by.

Further, Samuel was a child who was not merely given up to God, and brought up in God's house, but he was doing God's work. He could not offer sacrifices, but he could trim the lamps. He could not speak like Eli, but he could open the doors of the Lord's house, and it was as necessary that somebody should open the doors as that somebody else should be inside when the doors were opened, ready to attend to the more important parts of the solemn service. Happy, happy child, whose earliest work is work for God, whose earliest hearing is hearing the voice of God, whose earliest breath is spent in the praise of God! God grant, of his infinite mercy, that our children may be such children, and he shall have the praise!

I am going to apply Samuel's little speech, "Here am I," specially to grown-up people, yet I am not going to exclude children from the application. When God called Samuel, he answered, "Here am I." Now, firstly, *what did this show?* and, secondly, *what did it foretell?*

I. I must devote the greater part of the time to the question, **WHAT DID SAMUEL'S ANSWER, "HERE AM I," SHOW?**

It showed, first, *a hearing ear*. God spoke, and Samuel heard. Have you a hearing ear, dear brother? Be grateful if you have, for all men have not that blessing. There are some who have an itching ear, and they come to a place of worship, not to hear to profit, but merely to judge, to criticize, to find fault, to draw comparisons between one speaker and another. If that is the case with you, dear friend, may the Lord cure your ears of itching, and open them to the truth, for they are stopped up. John Bunyan speaks of Eargate being stopped up with filth, and it often is so. Men cannot hear the voice of God because there is sin in the way,—some darling sin; and they are not wise enough to realize that what they hear will be the means either of saving them or of damning them. Hearing true gospel sermons is one of the most solemn occupations in which intelligent beings can be employed. Hearing ears are by no means common things; happy are ye who have them.

Samuel was asleep, yet he heard God's voice; but I know some people who are awake, yet who have not heard it. They have been sitting here with their eyes wide open, yet they have seen nothing

of the truth; and with their ears open too, yet the voice of God has never penetrated the secret chambers of their souls. How long some of you have been hearers only, and therefore not true hearers! How long have the ears of your heart been dull of hearing! You have heard my voice, but you have not heard God's voice. You have heard the voices of earnest teachers and preachers, but as yet the voice of God has not reached your heart.

In Samuel's case, it was the first time that God had spoken to him, yet he heard him; but, in your case, God has spoken to you many times, yet you have not heard his voice once. How many times has God spoken to some of you? Can you calculate how many gospel sermons you have heard? I heard someone say, the other day, as she opened her Bible, and looked at the texts which she had marked, from which she had heard me preach these many years, "What a responsibility to have heard so many sermons from such texts as these!" And she said more which it is not for me to repeat; but I felt, "Yes, there is truth in that." If God has sent us to preach his Word, you may depend upon it that he will resent it if you do not hear the message that he sends to you through us. It will not merely be a rejection of the ambassador of Christ, but a rejection of the King who sent him to you. Therefore, I pray that God may give to each one of you a hearing ear.

I expect that the voice of God to Samuel was only a faint call. It was in the night watches, and I suppose that the Lord spoke softly, "Samuel, Samuel." Yet Samuel heard at once; but the voice of God to some of you has been a loud one, he has spoken to you not only in loving exhortations, but with the voice of threatening. You have had Christ set before you in the gentleness of his love, but you have also seen him in the terror of his vengeance. You have heard concerning the wrath to come, the pit without a bottom, and the fire that never shall be quenched. I can say, with Paul, that "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." I have not kept back anything from you, however terrible the truth was. These lips have never sought to make the penalty of sin appear lighter than Scripture makes it, nor to pare down the dread solemnities of eternity to please this evil generation. Nay; we have let Sinai speak with its pealing thunders as well as Calvary with its gentle wooings; and yet, alas! there are still some here who have not heard God's voice so as to heed it.

God has spoken to you through your conscience; he has made you shake in your beds, and tremble as you walked about the streets. He has spoken to you through that dear child who once nestled in your bosom, but who was called away to heaven. He has spoken through that beloved friend with whom you took sweet counsel, who was suddenly smitten with a death-sickness, and taken away from you. It might have been yourself; that funeral might have been your own, and then, where would your soul have been? God has spoken to you by the fever that laid you low, the effects of which are still upon you. He has spoken to you through that accident, from which you only escaped as it were by the skin of your teeth. Again and again has God spoken to you so that both

your ears have tingled, but there it ended; the avenue from your ears to your heart has still been blocked up by the devil and his angels, and by your sin; and, as yet, you have not answered to the divine call, and said, "Here am I." If you were deaf, you might be excused for not hearing; but you have ears, yet you hear not. You could hear God's voice if you wished to hear it, but you are not willing; your inability lies in your will, and that inability is the real obstruction. It is not so much a subject for pity as for censure, and so you will find it at the last great day. But I pray that there may be many among you who, when the gospel call is sounded, will say, "Here am I. I am a hearer of the Word, and I do enjoy hearing it. It is sweet to me, and I do lay hold on eternal life through hearing the voice of Jesus in the gospel." Blessed be the name of the Lord if you can truthfully say this!

The next thing I see in this answer of Samuel is a *responsive heart*. "The Lord called Samuel," and he not merely heard, but sounded, will say, "Here am I. I am a hearer of the Word, and call. Many of you have heard the gospel; be thankful if, in addition to hearing it, you have been able to give a response to it. I remember the first response that I gave to the gospel. It threatened me with punishment for my sin; and when I was able to respond to it, I said, "I deserve that threatening, and I bow my head to the dust;" and, for some years, the only part of the gospel to which I could respond was that part which destroyed my self-righteousness and my carnal hopes, and made me feel that I was lost. Now, if you cannot go any further than that, thank God that you can go so far. If, when the Word that is preached to you says "You have broken the law of God, and you must pay the penalty of your disobedience," you say, "Here am I; I cannot complain of the justice of the sentence;" I thank God that you can go so far as that. There is something of the life of God in the soul that yields its assent and consent to the denunciations of divine justice.

But, beloved, how much better it is when you can go further than this! Some of us can recollect when we went further, when the voice of God sounded over the mountains of our guilt, and said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" and we replied, "Here am I," and we looked unto him, and were lightened; and our faces were not ashamed. Christ said, "Where are you, sinner?" and we said, "Here am I." "Come," said he, "to my cross. Are you there, sinner?" And we answered, "Here am I." "I am looking down with love," said he; "look up with joy if you are there;" and we answered, "Here am I." Oh, it was a blessed thing for us when we had come to that point where Christ would receive us, where the gospel spoke of pardon, and we accepted it; where the gospel spoke of simple faith, and we exercised the simple faith which God had given to us; where the gospel spoke of putting away sin, and we rejoiced to have it put away; where the gospel spoke of repentance, and we rejoiced to have repentance, and to forsake the world, and to follow Jesus!

In addition to having a hearing ear and a responsive heart, it is clear that Samuel had a *teachable spirit*. When the Lord called

Samuel, he said, "Here am I;" that is to say, "I am ready to hear what thou hast to say to me. Speak, Lord; I only want thee to speak, and it shall be enough for me. I am thy willing disciple, waiting to learn whatever thou wilt teach me." I do not know any position that is better for a Christian to occupy than that of sitting with Mary at the Master's feet, and looking up into his face, saying, "Lord, I love thee, and I know something of thy truth; but hast thou not more of it to teach me? Lord, is there any duty which thou hast enjoined upon thy followers, but which I have not yet seen to be a duty? Then, show it to me, Lord, for here am I, waiting to know thy will. Is there a doctrine that I have kicked against, which is, after all, thy doctrine? Then, Lord, instruct me in it. Will it cause me to forsake my former associates if I am true to thee? If it must be so, I will give them all up; for, Lord, here am I, waiting to learn of thee."

It is the want of this resolve that makes so many denominations in the world to-day. Most professors never look in the Bible to see what is right and what is wrong. Their father and mother went to a certain place of worship, so they go to it. They saw things in a certain light, and their children do the same; but they never search the Scriptures to see whether these things be so or not. I am afraid there are many Christians, and some ministers too, who would be afraid to search the Scriptures, lest they should learn too much from them. We should soon end all the divisions in the Church of Christ if we took this blessed Book only,—no book of prayer, no book of sermons, no book of devotions, and no catechism as our rule of life; nothing but this Book, and opened it, saying, "Lord, speak, for thy servant heareth; whatever thou hast to say to me, here am I, waiting to know and to do thy will." I ask every Christian here whether he can honestly say that he has given up his mind to be moulded by the Holy Spirit; whether, upon questions that are in dispute among men, he has really searched the Scriptures, and whether he is prepared at all costs to follow the truth wherever it leads him; for this is both the duty and the honour of the Christian, and in that day when the Lord shall stand upon Mount Zion, the hundred and forty and four thousand who shall be specially honoured will be those who "*follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.*" Notice those words, "*whithersoever he goeth;*" following the Lamb in little things and great things, in doctrinal matters, in the Christian ordinances,—not following man's custom, nor any church's regulations, but following the Lamb "*whithersoever he goeth.*"* God give us grace, then, to reply to the call of Jesus, "Here am I, Lord. Dost thou bid me believe this doctrine? Here am I. Dost thou bid me be baptized in thy name? Here am I. Dost thou bid me come to thy table? Here am I. Dost thou bid me work for thee, or suffer for thee, or even die for thee? Show me what thou wouldst have me to do, for here am I, waiting and willing to do it."

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,324, "The Followers of the Lamb;" and No. 2,456, "The Lamb our Leader."

Now, in the fourth place, this answer of Samuel showed that *he was in the right position*. Adam was not in his right position when God called him in the garden of Eden, but Samuel was in bed, and that was where he ought to have been, for it was bed-time; so, when the Lord called Samuel, he was not ashamed to answer, "Here am I." I wonder whether some professing Christians would be willing to say to God, "Here am I," when they are in certain positions and conditions. They can hardly justify themselves to themselves; then, how can they justify themselves to their Lord? I pray, brethren and sisters in Christ, that we may always live in such a position that, whenever the Lord calls to us, we may be able to answer without shame, "Here am I." We should never be where we should be ashamed to meet our Master.

For instance, the Lord Jesus calls all his servants to come out from the world, and be separate, set apart unto him,—to go without the camp, bearing his reproach. Suppose he were to come here to-night, and begin to speak to us about being separate from sinners, could each one of you answer, "Lord, here am I; by thy grace, I have taken up my cross, and come right away from everything of which thou wouldst disapprove, to the best of my knowledge; and in my life I have endeavoured not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of my mind"?

Further, the Lord Jesus Christ bids his children join in fellowship with one another by uniting in Christian churches. Suppose he were to come to-night, and to ask us who profess to be his, "Are you all joined together in the bonds of Christian union that I ordained for you?"—are there not some Christians here, who never made a Scriptural profession of their faith, and who, therefore, could not reply, "Here am I"? Where are you, then? "Oh, I am sneaking away somewhere in the background for fear anybody should find me out. I am afraid I should be jeered at if I were known to be a Christian." O, you coward, have you never read that solemn message of Christ, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels"? When the muster-roll of the visible church is called, it is a great comfort for anyone to be able to answer, "Here am I."

Besides that, the Lord Jesus would have his people meet together for prayer. On the next prayer-meeting night, will each one of you be able to answer, "Here am I"? I hope so; yet there are some of you whom I do not very often see at the prayer-meeting. I have no fault to find with the most of you, for you love the house of God, and you love to meet with the saints for prayer and praise, and worship; but there are some who forsake the assembling of themselves together. A brother prayed, recently, for those who were detained on beds of sickness and arm-chairs of laziness; and I am afraid there are a good many of the second sort. Do not you be one of them; but when the roll of those that meet together for prayer is read, may you be able to reply when your name is called, "Here am I."

Christ would also have his people work for him. When the great Captain of our salvation bids the sergeant call the roll of his soldiers, I like to hear the answer, whether it is from the pulpit, or from the Sunday-school, or from the Tract Society, "Lord, here am I; here am I; here am I." But what has become of that man who was so zealous five years ago? I do not hear him say, "Here am I." "No," he says, "I cannot come so far now." Yet it is no further than it was five years ago; it is not that the distance is too far for him to walk, it is his distance from Christ that accounts for his absence. But when the roll was read just now, where was that man who used to teach in the Sunday-school ten years ago? He has given up, he says, to let the young people have a turn now. Yes, but he would not like the Lord to leave off blessing him, and to give the young people all his presence and grace. Suppose the sun were to say, "I have shone long enough, and I shall put out my flames," and the air were to say, "I have supplied breath long enough," and the sea were to say, "I have pulsed long enough as the life-blood of the world," and the earth were to say, "I have yielded bread long enough," where should we all be? When we need to receive no more, then we may say that we will do no more; but so long as we are receiving of the grace of God, we must come into the ranks of the workers for him, and each one reply, when our name is called, "Lord, here am I." I ask every believer,—whereabouts in Christ's field of service are you? What are you doing for the Lord Jesus Christ? Are any of you compelled to reply that you are doing nothing for him?

Perhaps one says, "My family requires my care." Then, give it your care; you cannot do better than serve the Lord at home. I have known fathers go out preaching who ought to have stopped at home to teach their own children; and good women, who have been very busy at sewing-meetings, who would have been better employed at home. But I am not now speaking about those who are doing good works at home. If that is your sphere, fill it, and God bless you in it! But I am speaking to others, young people especially, upon whom there is a claim for service for Christ. What are you doing for Jesus, my young brother? "Nothing at present, but I have been thinking of doing something by-and-by." Ah! but it is good for a man that he should bear this yoke in his youth. There is no worker for Christ like the young worker. I bless God that I was preaching the gospel at sixteen years of age; I could never have found such pleasure and ease in doing my Master's work if I had not begun to do it early, and you Christian young people cannot serve the Master too soon. Samuel said, "Here am I," and I want you, John, and Thomas, and William, and you, Mary, and Jane, and Elizabeth, each one to reply distinctly, "Here am I; here am I; here am I." Come into Christ's Church, engage in Christ's work, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things.

Once more, I think that Samuel's answer implied a *submissive spirit*. He said, "Here am I," as much as to say, "What am I to do, Lord? I am ready for any service that is appointed unto me.

Here am I." That was a grand answer of the prophet Isaiah to the Lord's question, "Whom shall I send?"—"Here am I; send me." Dear brethren and sisters in Christ, are we all of us up to that mark in the matter of service for the Saviour? Several of our Sunday-schools are short of teachers, will you not say, "Here am I"? It is a very delightful Christian work, and Christians ought to spring forward to fill every gap in the ranks. There are thousands of workers wanted in this great city,—workers to go into the lodging-houses, workers to visit poverty-stricken districts, workers to get at the rich in their drawing-rooms, and workers to get at the poor in their slums. O Christians, will you not answer with alacrity, "Here we are, Lord; what department of service can we take"? Suppose the Lord were to set you, my sister, to work among the extreme poor, would you say, "Here am I"? Suppose, my brother, you had to go on working, and everybody sneered at you, could you still say, "Here am I"? It is easy, when there is a good berth to be had in the church, to say, "Here am I." If there is a bishopric to be given away, you can find a self-denying minister who says, "Here am I;" but if it is only a poor living, not so readily should we get the response, "Here am I." Yet, if our hearts were in a right state, we should be willing to do anything that the Master gave us to do. If two angels were sent out of heaven, and one was to preach in this pulpit and the other to sweep a muddy crossing, they would not mind which they did. So long as God gave them their work, they would feel an equal pleasure and an equal honour in doing it whatever it might be. Are you ready to say, for service, "Here am I"?

Can each Christian here say the same with regard to suffering? Here I come to heart-searching work. If Christ wants one who can bear reproach for him, can you say, "Here am I"? If he wants one who can suffer the loss of prosperity, and become poor, can you say, "If it be for thy glory, Lord, here am I," and can you endure it if you do say so? If God should lay a heavy affliction upon you, and rack you with pain from day to day, can you say, "Here am I"? In the dreary night-watches, I confess that I have not found it easy; I have wanted to be able to say, "Lord, here am I," but I have caught myself saying, "I do not want to be here much longer; I want to be up, preaching the gospel again, for I do not like lying here, going without my necessary rest, and feeling countless depressions of spirit and grievous pains of body." But I know some Christians, who are more inured to pain, who have learned to say, with old Eli, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." I daresay some of you remember Dr. Hamilton's story of poor Betty, who said, "The Lord said to me, 'Betty, look after your husband and your house,' and I did it; and then he said, 'Betty, go and talk to your neighbours about Jesus,' and I did that; and then he said, 'Betty, go and lie on the bed, and cough,' and I am doing it, blessed be his holy name!" Ah, but it needs a great deal of grace to lie and cough to God's glory; yet it is being done, and the groans of sick, yet submissive, saints are as musical to God's ear as the hallelujahs of archangels.

II. Now my time has fled, so I can only give you the outline of what I was going to say in answer to my second question, WHAT DID THIS UTTERANCE OF THE CHILD SAMUEL FORETELL FOR HIM?

Why, it foretold, first, *further communications from God*. Those who answer to God's call shall hear his voice again. If you are faithful to what you do know, you shall know more. If you can truly say, "Here am I," God will call you again, and keep on calling you as long as he has messages to give you.

It foretold, secondly, *higher service for Samuel*. The little boy who, on his bed, said to God, "Here am I," would grow up to be a prophet who would speak God's words so faithfully that God would not let one of his words fall to the ground. The child who promptly answers to God's voice becomes the echo of God's voice ere long. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." He who uses one talent well shall have ten talents entrusted to him.

It foretold, next, that *Samuel would have prevalance in prayer*. God spoke, and Samuel heard; so he might be sure that the Lord would, as we say, "return the compliment." Very often God will not hear us because we will not hear him. If he speaks, and we are deaf to his voice, we must not wonder if we find him deaf when we speak to him. Our success in prayer will often depend upon our obedience to precept; you cannot have the promise torn away from the precept. That would be like cutting a living child in two.

And, lastly, I am sure that this reply of Samuel's foretold that *he would have gladder calls afterwards*. He who was called to hear a servile or menial message in the dead of night, and yet said, "Here am I," should afterwards be called to lead the Lord's chosen people, to speak powerfully to them in Jehovah's name, and to anoint Saul to reign over them when they clamoured for a king. O, dear brother or sister in Christ, the Lord Jesus has called, and you have answered, "Here am I." He has called for you to suffer, and you have said, "Here am I." He has called you, my sister, to give up your husband and your children, and you have yielded to his will, and answered, "Here am I;" so let me tell you what he will do by-and-by. When the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the cistern, he will say to you, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away;" and that message will be so welcome to you that you will gladly answer, "Lord, here am I." Have I not seen many Christians, propped up in their beds with their pillows, speaking joyously to all around, and telling them that the chariot had come to bear them to their Beloved? Have I not seen them step into that chariot, to be borne away to dwell at God's right hand for ever? That was their way of saying to the Lord, "Here am I." Their bodies slumber in the dust, as yours and mine shall do before long, unless the Lord shall first come; and one of these days, when we are lying beneath the sod, and the daisies are blooming above us, there will come the sound of the archangel's trumpet, but the Lord's voice will be in it, and he will call, "Samuel! Samuel!" and you will recognize his voice, and know your own name, and you will answer, "Here am I," and

your very dust shall rise again to be re-animated in a nobler image, and made like unto your Lord. Then will come the judgment, and the great white throne shall be set, and the books shall be opened; and the King will say to those upon his right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." What a joy it will be to each one of his saints then to answer, "Here am I, Lord, by thy sovereign grace, at thy right hand, numbered amongst thy sheep, and welcomed with them to glory everlasting!"

Perhaps some of you think that only a great and eminent saint will be able, in that day, to answer, "Here am I;" but I can tell you one name that will be read out then,—“Mrs. Much-afraid,” and she will answer, “Here am I.” There will be something strange in her voice, for she never used to speak like that when she was down here; but now she speaks up as boldly as Paul himself does, “Here am I, Lord.” And Ready-to-halt, without his crutches, will answer as bravely as any of the apostles; and poor members of the church, who were not much noticed on earth, will each one answer, “Here am I;” and that feeble one, who was always doubting, trembling, fearing, fretting, and worrying, and yet for all that did somehow rest in the Lord, will answer, “Here am I;” methinks the music of heaven would lose its sweetest note if there were not many a little one there to answer, “Here am I.” If, on Christmas night, when you were gathered around the blazing fire, and the big log was burning on the hearth, and you were ready to sing for joy, somebody were to ask, “Where is the baby?” there would be but one answer, “What, is she not here?” Mother does not know where she is; does not father know? No, he thought the little one was all right; but do not her brothers and sisters know where the little one is? Suppose someone should say, “Don’t worry yourselves about her, you be merry among yourselves.” But mother cannot be merry without her baby, and father cannot rest, and brothers and sisters cannot rejoice as long as the little one is not there to share their joy; and I can tell you that God himself, and Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit himself, and the holy angels, and all the host of the redeemed could not be happy in heaven if one dear child of God, who had trusted in Jesus, should be missing at the last great day. They would stop the angelic harps to find that lost one, and empty out heaven, and send every angel and every saint out as a scout to find this poor little lost one that cannot be lost. If you are trusting in Jesus, answer to your name now, and say to Christ, “Lord, here am I;” and then you will be able to say to him, before the throne, “Here am I, Lord, and here will I adore thee for ever and for ever.” God bless you, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

1 SAMUEL II. 12—36; AND III. 1—18.

Chapter ii. Verse 12. *Now the sons of Eli were sons of Bebal; they know not the LORD.*