

THE SOUL'S ANSWER TO THE DIVINE SUMMONS**F.B. Meyer:****"I will go!" -- Genesis 24:58.**

Carry back your mind for thirty-seven centuries. The loft light of an Oriental sunset falls gently on the fertile grazing grounds watered by the broad Euphrates; and as its gloom lights up all the landscapes dotted by flocks, and huts, and villages, it irradiates with an especial wealth of color the little town of Haran, founded one hundred years before by Terah, who, travelling northwards from Ur, resolved to go no further. The old man was smarting keenly at the recent loss of his youngest son, and after him the infant settlement was named. And so in time houses were built, and girdled by a wall in Oriental style. There Terah died, and thence the caravan had started at the command of God across the terrible desert, for the unknown Land of Promise. One branch of the family, however -- that of Nahor -- lived there still. His son, Bethuel, was the head; and in that family, at the time of which I speak, there was at least a mother; a brother named Laban; and a daughter in the first flush of girlish beauty, Rebecca.

It is Rebecca who occupies the central place in the pastoral scene before us. All her young life had been spent in that old town. Daughter of the Sheikh though she was, yet she was not kept in that listless indolence which is the curse of so many well-born girls today. She could make savory meat, and tend the flocks, as her niece Rachel did in after-years on that same spot, and carry her pitcher gracefully poised upon her shoulder. She knew by name all the people who dwelt in that little town; and she had heard of those of her kindred who before her birth had gone beyond the great desert, and of whom hardly a word had travelled back for so many years. She little guessed the greatness of the world, and of her place in it; and in her wildest dreams she never thought of doing more than living and dying within the narrow limits of her native place. Elastic in step, modest in manner, pure in heart, amiable and generous, with a very fair face, as the sacred story tells us -- how little did she imagine that the wheel of God's providence was soon to catch her out of her quiet home, and whirl her into the mighty outer world that lay beyond the horizon of desert sand.

On a special evening a stranger halted at the well, outside the little town. He had with him a stately caravan of ten camels, each richly laden, and all bearing traces of long travel. There the little band waited, as if not knowing what next to do. Its leader was probably the good Eliezer, the steward of Abraham's house, who had come there on a solemn commission from his master. Abraham was now advanced in years. Isaac his son was forty years of age, and the old man longed to see him suitably married; and though his faith never doubted that God would fulfil His promise of the seed, yet he was desirous of clasping in his aged arms the second link between him and his posterity. He had therefore bound his trusty servant by a double oath: first, that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites around them, but from his own kith and kin at Haran; and secondly, that he would never be an accomplice to Isaac's return to the land which he had left. This solemn oath was lit up by the assurance of the old man, that the Lord God of heaven, who took him from his father's house and the land of his kindred, would send His angel before him, and would crown his mission with success.

Having arrived at the city-well towards nightfall, -- "even, the time that women go out to draw water" -- the devout leader asked that God would send him "good speed," addressing the Almighty as the Lord God of his master Abraham, and pleading that in prospering his way He would show kindness to his master. The simplicity and trustfulness of his prayer are very beautiful; and are surely the reflection of the piety which reigned in that vast encampment gathered around the wells of Beersheba, and which was the result of Abraham's own close walk with God. There would be less fault to find with servants in the present day, if they were treated as servants were once treated -- as souls rather than hands; and if they were encouraged to imitate, because they had learned to admire, the character of those with whom they live in such close contact. Alas that servants in Christian homes often find so little to attract them to the godliness which is professed, but scantily practiced!

IT IS OUR PRIVILEGE TO TALK WITH GOD ABOUT EVERYTHING IN LIFE

The minutest things are not too small for Him who numbers the hairs of our heads. No day can we afford to spend, without asking that He should send us good speed. Well would it be for us, as we stand by the well at morning, or at eventide, to commit our way unto the Lord, trusting that He should bring it to pass. And if this be true of ordinary days, how much more of those days which decide destiny, which are the watershed of life, and in which plans are concluded which may affect all after-years! Nor is it wrong for us to ask a sign from God, if by this we mean that He would permit the circumstances of our daily lot to indicate His will: to confirm by inner inspiration from Himself, and to embody, in fact, that which has already been impressed upon our own conscience. We have no right to ask for signs for the gratification of a morbid curiosity; but we are justified in

asking for the concurrence of outward providence indicating the will of God. It was a holy and a happy inspiration that led the godly servant to ask that the damsel, who responded with courteous alacrity to his request for water, should be she whom God had appointed as a bride for his master's son; and it happened to him as it will always happen to those who have learned to trust like little children, that "before he had done speaking," his answer was waiting by his side.

We need not tell in detail all that followed: the gifts of heavy jewelry; the reverent recognition of God's goodness in answering prayer, as the man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord; the swift run home; the admiration of mother and brother at the splendid gifts; the breathless telling of the unexpected meeting; the proffered hospitality of Laban, whose notions of hospitality were quickened by his keen eye for gain, and who spoke the words of welcome with extra heat because he saw the rich lading of the camels; the provision of straw and provender for the camels, of water for the feet of the weary drivers, and of food for their leader, and the refusal to eat until his errand was unravelled and its purpose accomplished; the story, told in glowing words, of Abraham's greatness; the narrative of the wonderful way in which the speaker had been led, and Rebecca indicated; the final request that her relatives would deal kindly and truly in the matter; and their unhesitating and swift consent in words that drew the old servant prostrate to the ground in holy ecstasy as he worshipped the Lord. "Behold," they said, "Rebecca is before thee; take her and go: and let her be thy master's wife, as the Lord hath spoken."

Then from his treasures he brought forth jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment with which to deck Rebecca's fair form; her mother and Laban also received precious things to their hearts' desire. "Then they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night." In the early dawn, refusing all invitation to further waiting, Abraham's steward started back again, carrying with him Rebecca and her nurse; and through the fragrant morning air the blessings of that little cluster of friendly hearts were wafted to her ear, as seated on her camel, and wrapped in a dream of girlish hope and wonder, she caught the last voice from her home. "They addressed Rebecca and said unto her, Thou art our sister: be thou the mother of thousands of millions; and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them,"

We must thus pass over the details of this story, which carries on its forefront the stamp of inspiration and of truth; suffice it to say that it has no superior in this book for its rich, soft, placid style. It is full of those touches of nature which make all men kin, and which move them everywhere alike. Let us not elicit two or three further lessons to illustrate by it the Divine summons, and the answer of the soul.

(1) A LESSON TO THOSE WHO CARRY THE SUMMONS OF GOD. -- LET US SATURATE OUR WORK WITH PRAYER

Like his master, the servant would not take a single step without prayer. Not that he always spoke aloud. No one would have known that the old man prayed as he stood there by the well. Nor did he arbitrarily dictate to God; but he threw the whole responsibility of the matter upon Him who had ever shown Himself so true a Friend to his beloved master. He had a most difficult thing to do, in which strong chances were running against him. Was it likely that a young girl would care to leave her home to cross the vast expanse of sand in company with himself, a complete stranger, and to become the wife of one whom she had never seen? "Peradventure the woman will not follow me!" and if she were willing, her relatives might not be; but he prayed, and prayed again, and God's good speed crowned his errand with complete success.

We too are sometimes sent on very unlikely errands: Humanly speaking, our mission seems likely to prove a failure; but those who trust in God have not the word "failure" in their vocabulary. Their hearts are centers from which the fragrance of silent prayer is ever exhaling into the presence of God. They succeed where they seem menaced with certain disappointment. Christian worker! never start on any mission for God, whether to an individual soul or to a congregation, without the prayer, "Send me good speed this day."

WE MUST ALSO WAIT UPON GOD FOR DIRECTION

Abraham's steward asked that the chosen bride should be willing to draw water for his camels. A trifle this must seem to some; and yet it was a true test for a girl's nature. It showed a ready kindness of heart, which was prepared to outrun the requirements of conventional politeness. It indicated a nature in which haughty pride had no place. Is it not a fact that in such trivial, unstudied acts there is a sure index of character? Very often God's servants make great mistakes; because they force themselves on souls, not living in the will of God, not seeking the indication of His bidding, not waiting until He should open the door of circumstance into some new life. We do not always realize the solemn mystery that surrounds each human soul; or the depths into which all spiritual consciousness may have receded; or the thick cake of worldliness and carelessness which may have

crusted over the sensibilities of the being. God only understands all this; and we should do very wisely to wait expectantly and trustfully for Him to open up the way of access into the citadel of the heart. We may be sure that in this God will not fail us, but that whilst we are speaking He will hear and answer.

LET US SAY MUCH IN PRAISE OF OUR MASTER

It is beautiful to notice how eloquent the old man is about his master. He does not say one word about himself, or extol himself in any way, so absorbed was he in the story of his absent, distant lord. Was not this also characteristic of the Apostles, who preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and whose narratives are like colorless glass, only letting His glory through? Alas! that we so obtrude ourselves, that men go away talking of us. Let us lose ourselves in our theme. And whilst we show the jewels of Christian character in our own deportment, let the theme of our message be: "The Lord Jehovah hath greatly blessed our Master, Christ, and has given Him a name which is above every name; and has raised Him to His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and every name that is named: and He is worthy to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." And when success attends your words, be sure to give all the glory to Him from whom it has come.

(2) THE SUMMONS ITSELF was a call to a simple, penniless girl to ally herself in marriage to one of the wealthiest and noblest of earth's aristocracy. It was not sent because of her worth, or wealth, or beauty; but because it was so willed in the heart and counsel of Abraham. Such a call is sent to every soul that hears the Gospel. In yonder azure depths lives the great Father God. He has one Son, His only-begotten and well-beloved. He has resolved to choose from amongst men those who as one Church shall constitute His bride for ever. He sends this call to you, not because you are worthy, or wealthy, or beautiful; but because He has so willed it in the counsels of His own heart; and He longs that you shall be willing to detach yourself from all that you hold dear. This is His message: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear! forget also thine own people and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him" (Psalm 95:10-11)

And if that call is obeyed, thou shalt lose thine own name, sinner, in His name; thou shalt be arrayed in His fair jewels; thou shalt share His wealth; thou shalt sit down with Him on His throne; all things shall be thine. Wilt thou go with this Man? Wilt thou leave all to be Christ's? Wilt thou give thine unseen Lover thine heart, to be His for ever? Come and put yourself under the convoy of the blessed Holy Spirit, who pleads the cause of Jesus, as did Abraham's servant that of Isaac; and let Him conduct you where Jesus is.

(3) HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS SUMMONS. -- WE MUST FIND ROOM FOR IT

"Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared a house and room." The Master saith, "Where is the guest-chamber?" There was no room for Christ in the inn: but we must make room for Him in the heart: or, at least, we must be willing that He should make room for Himself.

WE MUST BEAR WITNESS

"The damsel ran, and told her mother's house." As soon as you have heard the call, and received the jewels of promise, which are the earnest of your inheritance, you must go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for you.

WE MUST NOT PROCRASTINATE, OR CONFER WITH FLESH AND BLOOD

Men, and circumstances, would fain defer our starting on pilgrimage. This is Satan's method of breaking off the union for ever. There must be no dallying or delay: but when the enquiry is put to us, "Wilt thou go with this man?" we must promptly and swiftly answer, "I will go."

The journey was long and toilsome; but all the way the heart of the young girl was sustained by the tidings told her by the faithful servant, who beguiled the weary miles with stories of the home to which she was journeying, and the man with whom her life was to be united -- "Whom having not seen, she loved; and in whom, though she saw him not, she rejoiced." She already loved him, and ardently longed to see him.

One evening the meeting came. Isaac had gone forth to meditate at eventide, sadly lamenting the loss of his mother, eagerly anticipating the coming of his bride, and interweaving all with holy thought. And when he lifted up his eyes across the pastures, lo, the camels were coming, and the two young souls leapt to each other.

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Happy meeting! which made Rebecca oblivious to all the trials and hardships of her journey, and the loss of her friends. Was it not also an emblem of the moment when the work of the Holy Spirit, our gracious Conductor, will conclude in the presence of our Lord, the true Bridegroom of saintly hearts, and we shall see his face, to be for ever with Him, going no more out for ever?

And after a while in that silent home, there was again the prattle of childish voices; and for several years the patriarch rejoiced in the presence of his grandchildren, to whom he would tell the history of the past, on which his aged soul loved to dwell. And of one narrative those lads would never tire; that which told how their father had once climbed the summit of Moriah, to be, as it were, raised from the dead.