

# Our Response To God's Revelation

Luke 20: 11

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## OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S REVELATION

"...and he sent another" Luke 20:11

The telephone rings. Now there are people who can let a phone ring and ring and not answer it. I am not one of those people. When a phone rings I just have to answer. It is utterly inconceivable to me how anyone can do anything else. Presumably my number is being called—I keep on believing that in spite of the times the call proves to be a wrong number. So I take up the receiver and according as I have been trained say one of several things, a cheerful, "hello", a sharp, "yes", an imperious, "well, go on", or "good morning, this is Harold Griffis speaking". Always there is the implied question, "what do you want of me?" Sometimes I put in a call for someone in a far distant city. Then I tell the operator with whom I wish to speak and ~~make~~ a person-to-person call. So many times after a few moments I hear the question, "Mr. Smith is not there, will you talk with anyone else?" Of course I cannot talk with anyone else because my business is with Smith and only Smith can give me the answer I need. Person-to-person, that is the call that God is putting in to you this morning. The terrible and yet wonderful thing is that you must reach out, to carry out the figure of our illustration, and pick up the phone. God calls, but you determine whether or not you will answer. The old hymn has it:

"God calling yet! And shall He knock,  
And I my heart the closer lock?  
He still is waiting to receive,  
And shall I dare His Spirit grieve?"

You can! Two amazing things happen. One is that you can refuse to answer when God calls. The other is that God keeps on calling and does not grow weary. Do you like to call lists of people? Perhaps you have to do so whether you like it or not. But do you have the patience to call again and again and again. Maybe you have a list to call for Men's Club and you finally decide that you have called that number enough times and you have been told no enough times so you stop. God does not stop.

In this illustration I think I have given you the whole philosophy, or if you prefer, the whole theology of revelation. By revelation we mean any activity of God by which He discloses truth to ~~men and women~~. Let me hasten to say that it is my belief that God is now doing all He can to make His will known to us. He never will

take from us the freedom to listen or not to listen. In the Bible ~~the~~<sup>will</sup> negative response to God is "described ...as hearing God and refusing to answer, seeing light but refusing to acknowledge its meaning or refusing to follow it; knowing God and then forgetting him, hardening the heart, rebelling and many others which all add up to man's "No" to God." (1) God is calling, the problem is that we are not listening. Rufus Jones says: "The failure in our communion and correspondence with God is due, I am sure, not to a limitation of love at the point of transmission, but, rather, to a dullness of heart at the receiving station."

Let me ask this question, "Are you really trying to hear what God is saying to you through the message of Advent and Christmas?" Do you have that essential attitude of expectancy? Have you yet sat down alone to read carefully what the Bible says in the first chapters of Luke and Matthew? More than that as you read ~~hate~~ you asked yourself, what does this mean for me, today? I should like to ask another question, how did you come into this service today. Did you come with the attitude, well, I wonder what he has this morning? Or did you prepare yourself for this service by saying some such prayer as "May the meditations of my heart in this hour, be acceptable in thy sight; may I strive for a new understanding of thy word and will." Only you can take the phone off the hook! They used to tell me that one of the fundamental laws of teaching was "readiness". You just cannot teach anyone anything unless he is ready. I have seen this illustrated in religion so many times when a person has left our church for some other expression of religion. Christian Science comes to my mind. I think I can guarantee to do more for a person through this church than he can have done for him in Christian Science PROVIDED he will do for me what ~~he~~ will do for the Christian Science practitioner or reader. I think that our church has the resources to do as much for a person as any other church again PROVIDED that person will do what we tell him to do.

I am not sure this is a very good illustration—but I'll give it anyway. There was once a woman who used to call me on the phone and talk for fifteen or twenty minutes just as fast as she could talk. She never gave me a chance to get a word in edgewise. I finally hit on the expedient of letting her get started and then of putting the phone down on the desk. You could still hear her all over the office. Once in a while I would pick up the phone and say, "yes", or "of course", or "by all means." When I thought she had about run down I would say "Goodbye, call me again."

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Not for a minute would I compare God to that woman! But I would compare our attitude toward God's revelation. We come to church in that way, we read our Bible 's that way, we pray that way. Then we wonder why we do not understand what God says.

Of course there are times when we simply do not want to understand. Have you ever known anyone who could be "conveniently deaf," who always heard the things you did not want her to hear, but failed to hear the things you did want her to hear. I remember the secretary of the Board of Trustees of a church who used a tremendous hearing aid. His hearing aid was hid in no pair of glasses. He carried a case which had four rather large microphones. At a meeting he would put that case up on the table and flip the switch. Sometimes things did not go as he would like to have them go. In such times I have seen him quietly and unobtrusively reach up and turn off the contraption. When he read the minutes at the next meeting there were omissions which sometimes got by. Worse than that he used an earphone in church and I have seen him, during the sermon, reach out and flick a switch. But I have seen other people suddenly go deaf in church. I can tell by the expression on their faces. Someday I am going to preach a sermon on "When Do You Stop Listening" and I am going to take for a text

~~The rich young man heard Jesus speak and he had his guidance but he did not hear~~  
There are times when God 's revelation is complete counter to our own wishes and then we make this awful decision to go our own way. Jesus recognized this and told a parable about it which we read this morning. "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants, and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, that they should give him some of the fruit of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him, and sent him away empty-handed." Then he sent another and yet another, and finally as a last act of desperation sent his own son who was killed by the tenants. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants." In this parable there is the teaching of God trying again and again to speak to men. There is also a warning of what happens to people who persistently refuse to listen to Divine guidance. But most important for me is the teaching that God's revelation often comes in the form of a demand.

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We may affirm God's revelation in one of two ways—we may say "Amen!" so be it. A member of my membership class said to me the other Sunday, "Why is it that the choir sings the "amens"? We are so in the habit of singing "amen" at the close of a hymn that we perhaps have lost the force of its meaning. So often we say it in a perfunctory sort of way. And in the same sort of way we acknowledge God 's revelation in our lives. But the real way to respond is through obedience. Christianity is never simply intellectual assent. Christianity ~~is always~~ <sup>is always</sup> a Way of life. More than that this Way of life involves us with others. So we must say, not only have you listened, but have you obeyed. Jesus tells another parable ~~about~~ <sup>about</sup> a man who had two sons; and ~~went~~ to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And he answered, I will not; but afterward he repented and went. And ~~went~~ <sup>he</sup> to the second and said the same; and he answered, I go, sir, but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father." (Matt. 21:28-32) How often we see this reenacted in the church—at least we see the second half of it! People who give easy assent, who have a ready "yes" on their lips but when we start looking for them we cannot find them. Both the church and society is saved, however, by those people who give not only their assent, but also their obedience. I am continually amazed by the devotion of people to good causes. They may sputter and fuss a bit but they go out and they do the things that need to be done. In their own hearts they have a reward, the reward that comes to those who say "yes" to God. My guess is that all of us have the feeling that heaven is a place where we shall be relieved of all responsibility. My friend, you are confused in your direction—that is not heaven! Just talk to some people who have retired and who no longer have any responsibility—just talk to someone who is in the hospital and has been told that he has to give up his responsibilities. The real satisfactions of life come from the realization that we are doing the will of God, by following the revelation which has come to us.

There is a Methodist Church in Brooklyn (Cliff was there last Sunday) that has a children's chapel, a beautiful chapel. Everything in that chapel is made from material that came from Palestine. There is one thing there that is closely related to this time of the year—a real Palestinian manger or crib made of stone. It could have been the manger in which Jesus lay. The entrance to that chapel is a small door meant for children. An adult has to stoop as he enters. Over the door is the inscription: Except



ye become as a child". Today we stoop in humility in order to discover the revelation -5-  
God has for us. We listen carefully to the word he says to us and we continue to  
listen no matter what it may involve as far as our lives are concerned, and then in  
glad obedience we go out to do that which He would have us do.

"The voice of God is calling Its summons unto men;  
As once He spake in Zion, So now He speaks again  
Whom shall I send to succor my people in their need?  
Whom shall I send to loosen The bonds of shame and greed?

We heed, O Lord, Thy summons, And answer: Here are we!  
Send us upon Thine errand, Let us Thy servants be  
Our strength is dust and ashes, Our years a passing hour;  
But Thou canst use our weakness To magnify Thy power

From ease and plenty save us; From pride of place absolve;  
Purge us of low desire; Lift us to high resolve;  
Take us, and make us holy; Teach us Thy will and way.  
Speak, and, behold! we answer; Command, and we obey."  
--John Haynes Holmes

#### References

- (1) "The Gift of Power" - Sherill
- (2) "The Idea of Penetration  
Recent Thought" - John Bailis
- (3) "A Theology of the Future  
Church" - De Wolf
- (4) "Some Expositions of  
Mystical Religion" - Rufus Jones.

Dec 7, 1955

Hepburns - 90 - As With Herons Men of Old  
100 - 3 Little Ones of Bethlehem

Scripture - Luke 20: 9-14

Lesson - Our Response To God's  
Revelations

## The Idea Of Revelation In Recent Thought

John Bailie

"...a great many people say...  
...If God really exists why  
does He not declare Himself  
more fully?"

"What sign would we want?"

"I have now come to ask myself  
whether God has not already done  
and is now doing all He can to  
make His will known to us, - short of  
deigning to meet our very freedom of  
inquiring of such we are anxious to  
reserve for ourselves. Is it not  
He who is already doing and is now  
doing all He can to make His will  
obvious by us short of deigning to  
meet our very freedom of will which  
is the last thing we would ask  
Him to take away from us."

1) "Much of the trouble is the days when  
I could not hear God's voice was that I  
was not really listening."

2) "There were certain things I did  
not want to hear."

"Consequently deaf."

"He said, 'I am God' and he said to me  
it was something he did not want to hear to.  
But he could not hear again because of the lack of  
revelation."

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2) "Then the positive response is put  
in terms of believing, having faith,  
and the like, the verbal proposition  
commonly suggest movement of  
the whole self toward or into God."

3) When it is put in terms of man's  
affirmation of God's revelation,  
it is expressed by the 'amen',  
which is a positive assertion: 'I  
believe it'.

4) When it is put in terms of obedience  
it is expressed by action, doing the  
will of God.

"The hard to reach men look with the  
response to original revelation and  
with the response to dependent or  
derived revelation, which more prefer  
to call illumination."

"When the Spirit is described as  
going forth into the human scene  
very often the point of the account  
is that the divine self-disclosure  
presumably fits some particular human  
situation."

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"...the fact of God's presence with  
men made to be consistently  
interpreted to persons of all ages  
and stages of life as that they  
may perceive it. It means that  
the human response to revelation  
while it is the direct response of us  
I to a God, is nevertheless open to  
the kind of guidance which one  
person may offer to another."

(See the story of Samuel)

"And it means that the Christian  
community, in so far as it  
is indicated by the spirit, is a  
community where men  
participate in the revelation  
and re-creative word of God by  
his forthgoing into human life."

## Shenille The Gift Of Power

"The Response To Revelation"

"Of revelation is God's self-disclosure  
to man, then the core of the  
revelation, looked at from the human  
side, is to be found as the response  
of the human self to the divine  
self, God. It is a matter between  
person and Person, between an  
I and a Thou."

"The human response to revelation  
may be either negative or  
positive."

In Biblical language the  
negative response is described  
in such terms as denying God  
and refusing to answer, every  
light is refusing to acknowledge  
its meaning or refusing to follow  
it; denying God and then forgetting  
him, hardening the heart, rebelling  
and many others. It is man's 'No'  
to God."

1) In its positive form the human  
response to revelation is as simple as  
and yet more complex than, the 'Yes'  
which we utter as the deepest moment  
of our human relationship."

"It may be that this is one of the  
things that even the omnipotent  
God cannot do; He cannot  
without invading the area of  
free personality with which He  
himself has endowed us, get any  
further word through to us until we  
first harken obediently to the  
word He already speaking."

"It is clearly absurd to be pressing  
for some grand revelation of God's  
will while we are refusing to attend  
this or that small beginning of a  
revelation that is already an-  
nouncing itself to us."

"If you have listened here you  
obeyed?"

Bailie says: "revelation always  
means light on our ultimate  
human concern."

3) "Intellectual sophistication  
is so great that it is difficult  
to achieve or recover, that  
naked contact of our minds  
with the confronting reality  
out of which true wisdom can  
alone be born."

Except you become a little  
child again

"Only the innocent and  
child-like mind can harken  
allegorically."

"Just, are you sure there is not  
something which He is plainly  
saying to you, and to which you  
are not giving back?"

"The Father always speaks in  
the form of a demand."

"It always comes to us, not as  
isolated individuals but in  
our fellowship with each other.  
It is through the claims and  
needs of our neighbors that God  
makes His voice heard."