

SAMUEL ... the boy who saved a nation
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(I SAMUEL 3:8-10)

The last worshippers had gone from Shiloh; the shadows of night were falling upon Israel. A boy looked at the golden glow in the western sky, and slowly closed the doors of the sanctuary. Soon it would be bedtime; but before he retired for the night, it would be necessary to attend to the lamp. Yes, it was safe; already the flame was beginning to go out; there could be no danger of fire. Samuel went to his bed and lay down to sleep. How much did he know? Did he remember that Moses had served in this sacred shrine? Did he see again the resolute hands which first placed the lamp in position? Did he know that God had commanded the lamp should never be permitted to go out?

The Lamp Reflecting

What changes had taken place since those days! Then revival fervor had filled the souls of the people, and in response to the commands of God, plentiful supplies of olive oil had been brought to enable the lamp to continue burning. Those blessed days had gone. Now the people were lethargic, and even within the tabernacle an was not well. The lamp hanging before the altar was truly symbolical; the holy flame was dying. Once that great building had been the rallying point in the nation; once its precincts had echoed with the message of God. Now Shiloh was a dead church! The people knew of its existence, but few attended its services. Gone were the soul-thrilling orations given by Moses. Absent were the stirring, joyous dances of the women folk-Shiloh was just another place! Would it be correct to suggest that this is a picture of the modern church? The church has known times when her influence extended to all parts of the nation; when her ministers were prophets indeed; when sinners knelt in the sanctuary to seek and find God. Sometimes even now, in isolated places, it is possible for a moment to obtain glimpses of what used to be; but elsewhere the lamp is going out. Services are uninteresting, sermons are essays, and the monotonous ramblings of the preacher are but an apology for the cry of the ancient prophet whose denunciation of sin made kings tremble.

The Lad Responding

Samuel stood watching the flickering lamp-the lamp in which the heart of the nation was clearly reflected. God had waited for this moment. He remembered the home of strain where a woman, taunted by her jealous rival, had prayed earnestly for a son. Again and again God had refused to answer her petition. She was waiting for a boy; He waited for her. She saw only the nagging rival; He saw the dying nation. And then the waiting time ended, when Hannah promised to surrender her son for service if only God would grant her request. That moment made history. God gave to her the desire of her heart; and remembering to keep her vow, the grateful woman brought her son to the temple. Samuel remained, to "grow up before the Lord." He closed his eyes, and

SAMUEL ... the boy who saved a nation from the shadows came the voice of God. That night gave place to the dawn of a new day, and led to the rescue of a decadent nation. Some things are worthy of consideration. (i) No sin can ever destroy God's interest in His people. (ii) No home is too insignificant for God to visit. (iii) No nation need despair if within its borders God can find a Samuel.

The Lord Returning

Dawn had come. The boy, who seemed to have grown older, moved toward the door. He would never forget the moment when he whispered, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth." Neither would he forget that instant when an unseen hand ordained him for a special task. He had a great amount to learn, but at least his path in life had become clear. The door was opened; the light shone in, and the entire proceeding seemed prophetic. Soon it became known that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. His radiant face, his quiet dignity, his increasing power demonstrated the fact that God was with him; and all Israel watched and wondered. And then the old days returned, for worshippers increased; oil was brought again to the sacred house; the lamp continued to burn. And in many of Israel's homes, people remembered the boy in Shiloh. Probably more than one parent said, "We have no boy to give to God, but at least we can help to train this one," and every year they brought their tithes into God's storehouse, and revival came to Israel. Perhaps God is still looking for a Samuel. Again God may be waiting for a parent to say, "Lord, you can have my son." It might be well for us all to ask, "If the salvation of the world depended upon my readiness to help the Lord, what would happen?"

The Slave Boy

"How much am I bid for him?" The auctioneer was eloquent, but the slave buyers only laughed, for the boy being offered in the Nigerian market was unquestionably ugly. His thin, frightened face had an appalling appearance, and the buyers seriously doubted their ability to find a market for such a lad. The salesman tried again; and when no monetary bid was forthcoming, he sold the slave for a roll of tobacco. Everybody laughed. This was fun, and provided a little amusement amidst the more serious business of buying humans. The new owner took the lad; and other slaves, one by one, were offered to the traders. Soon, the ugly boy was marching with many other captives along the forest paths which led to the coast. He was careful to keep up with the others, for the merciless traders knew how to use a whip. The journey seemed endless, and sorrow filled his heart. His people and his village wore far behind; ahead lay slavery and the unknown. He tramped on. When the sea came into sight, he wondered what new horrors may be awaiting him, and fear again filled his heart when he was pushed aboard a ship and imprisoned in a hold. Then came a day when people seemed to be running all over the place. Voices were raised; something had gone wrong. British sailors had captured the ship; the evil traders were subdued. The slave vessel was brought into Freetown, where the slaves were set free. The boy was unable to

SAMUEL ... the boy who saved a nation fend for himself, so the authorities placed him in the care of some missionaries. It seemed difficult for the child to believe that these white people could be so kind, when other white people had been so cruel. And the years passed by. The ugly little boy heard about Christ, and ultimately became a Christian. He was sent to school, and through diligent study progressed admirably with his lessons.

Years later came the day when in the presence of great ecclesiastical dignitaries, in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, that same boy was consecrated the first Bishop of Nigeria. The lad who was sold for a roll of tobacco became Bishop Samuel Crowther, who did such a wonderful work for God in Africa. Today he is still lovingly remembered as the man who brought the light of the glorious Gospel to many people. Here was another Samuel, the boy who helped to save a nation.

The Boy Who Fell Out of Bed!

Bump! Unmistakably something was wrong; and mother, greatly alarmed, rushed toward the child's bedroom, to see her youngster sleepily getting to his feet. He had rolled too far to one side of the bed, and the result, for him, seemed catastrophic. The mother placed her arms around the child and asked if he had hurt himself. Reassured that all was well, she tucked him in bed once more; but before she went away, asked, "Son, how did you manage to fall out of bed?" His childlike answer was thought-provoking: "Mum, I suppose I stayed too close to the getting-in side." Perhaps, without knowing it, that boy supplied the answer to many modern Church problems. No thinking person within the Church would ever feel satisfied with the spiritual progress of all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus. Some seem to fall so easily; indeed, they seem to be forever falling. They must be staying so close to the getting-in side of Christianity. Just as each child needs to grow, so every Christian needs to grow in grace, until the babyhood experience has been left far behind, and the convert has grown strong in God. Progress is the password for spiritual growth; without this we remain dwarfs.

The Boy from Inverness

This story cannot be completed; I only know a part. It began in the mid-nineteen-forties, when one Sunday night I preached in the Empire Theater, Inverness, Scotland. I was conducting an evangelistic crusade in the Baptist Church, but my good friend the Rev. John MacBeath booked the theatre for the Sunday evening. At the conclusion of the service, several people came forward to indicate their desire to become Christians. Nearly thirteen years later, during my mission in Canada, a letter arrived, and the "Red Sea" postmark interested me greatly. I knew no one in that part of the world. When I opened the letter, I read among other things words to this effect, "Dear Mr. Powell, years ago in Inverness, Scotland, at the conclusion of your meeting in the Empire Theatre, one Sunday night, your wife led me to Christ. . . . I am now on my way to northern India to be a missionary. I thought you would like to know. . . ." His story is not yet finished. His name-George MacDonald. His address-158 Purasawelkam High-road, Madras

7, India.

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