

The Time of God's Calling

Sermon at St. Luke's Chapel, 25 August 2019 by Ari Savuoja

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Luke 19:41-48

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you.' [or the time of God calling you to be saved.]

⁴⁵ When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. ⁴⁶ 'It is written,' he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer"; but you have made it "a den of robbers".'

⁴⁷ Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. ⁴⁸ Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

There have been and will be times in each of our lives when God calls us somehow more than ever before. We call this the times when God is calling us to be saved, or the time of God's coming to us. God calls us through the difficulties and setbacks we face in our lives. Sometimes God even allows us sickness and great loss through which we can learn life's grand lessons.

God can also speak to us about the destinies of nations, how He guides them: for example, how during the Second World War a small Finland survived against great Russia and maintained its independence, while many other Russian neighbouring countries lost their independence: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, etc.

Most directly and clearly, God speaks to us in His Word, the Bible. We can experience the indirect talk of God in the silence of prayer, where God restores important things to our minds. Often God speaks in the words of songs or poems. God can speak through the story of a play or the art of a painting. Many of us are intrigued by the wonders of nature. We can see in them the imprint of the hand of God, as well as beautiful and manifold riches with which we are blessed with!

Very often God speaks to us through other people – either directly, by means of words or indirectly, by means of deeds or example. This reminds me of a song that tells the story of God talking to a shoemaker. The song is based on Jesus's own words, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," Matthew 25:40

The song is called [Suutari ja Vieras](#) [The Shoemaker and His Guest] and it was written by Finnish gospel musician Pekka Ruuska. It is based on Lev Tolstoy's short story from 1885, which is entitled "[Where Love is, there God is](#) or Martin the Cobbler". Also, Johnny Cash recorded a song based on the original story, "[The Christmas Guest](#)". In Finland, Pekka Ruusu took up the theme and turned it into his version. Also, other Finnish musicians such as Teppo Nuorva and Samuel Edelman recorded own versions. Here's Pekka Ruusu's version (free translation):

There was a shoemaker, an old and gentle man.

The whole city knew where he stayed.

*And now for Christmas, he cleaned up his home
and prepared a table with dishes, all of his best,
and told everyone the glad tidings:*

"The Master is coming to me!

He has told me, he visits for sure,

He is going to be my guest!

*The Master is coming to us today!
Can there be any better guest for Christmas!"*

*The shoemaker sits by the window waiting for the Master.
And it's not long before the door is knocked.
He's disappointed at first, for there's only
a poor woman with her child, numb with the cold.*

*He tells the woman, "The Master is coming to visit us.
He is going to be our guest!
Sit down for a while and wait for him with me!
The Master is coming to us today,
wrap your freezing child in this blanket of mine!"*

*But the Master is still not yet in sight, only a snowy road.
And along the way, a bum comes up to him.
He asks the shoemaker for a piece of bread,
as he is hungry and alone on Christmas Eve.*

*He tells the bum, "The Master is going to visit us.
He is going to be our guest!
Sit down for a while and wait for Him with me.
The Master is coming to us today,
eat this hot soup to appease your hunger!"*

*The evening gets dark and there's still no sight of the Master.
And the old shoemaker takes the dishes off the table.
And yet another knocking at the door – it's a drunkard, saying:
"I've lost my keys, I can't get home!"*

The shoemaker responds, "The Master is visiting us!

He is going to be our guest!

Sit down for a while and wait for him with me!

The Master is coming to us today,

if you stay for the night, I make the bed for you!"

But eventually the old shoemaker is also going to bed to find some rest.

In a dream he asks his Master, the long-awaited Guest, "You didn't come?"

The Master answers, "I visited you three times today!

Merry Christmas and thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

*This is a touching song! A similar situation is referred to in the Bible, in Hebrews where it says (13:2), "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to **angels** without knowing it."*

God's time of calling us or coming to us may concern the moral choices of our lives, but it is primarily about the foundation of our lives: whether we have built our lives in relation to the eternal God and His friendship with us, or whether we live apart from the Creator and Keeper of life. The moral choices of life matter, as was said in that song's story: everything we do for our fellow humans is always for God's created people.

But it is good for us to remember that even the best ethically good temporal life cannot last forever. Therefore, if you really want to appreciate the greatest gift of your life, which was given to you by the Giver of life, then you should save your life and protect it for longer than just about 70-80 years, which is a person's lifetime in general! If you really want to thank the Giver of your life, deposit your entire life into the Inventor's and Creator's account, it will always last and its value will be endless!

How can this be achieved? The username for depositing in God's account is the confession of your own sins and the password is Jesus: through Him you will have access to all of the treasures that our Heavenly Father has in store for you. They will always remain in God's account for you and your password will never expire.

In the Gospel text we read today, Jesus, our Lord, mourns Jerusalem because Jerusalem did not recognise God's coming or calling. It had been given the opportunity, it had been spoken to, it had heard the message of what should be done. But she didn't want to turn and repent of her sin. She wanted to remain complacent and self-sufficient in life. The people of Jerusalem thought, "We are the children and descendants of our father Abraham – we do not need to come to the advice of a carpenter from Nazareth!". They maintained their self-centered religiosity, according to which nothing had to be corrected or altered in their concepts of faith and God. They hardened their hearts!

Gladly, God is righteous: He certainly gave the people of Jerusalem the same and just opportunity to repent as for everyone else. God, the source of goodness and love, has given you and me sufficient opportunity to receive His goodness and salvation from this world of sin and sickness. None of us can blame God.

The crux of the matter is that you and I don't have to do anything to be saved. In fact, there is no way you can earn or achieve salvation by yourself. God is only asking you and me for permission to give His goodness to us. Do you and I still want to receive and thank Him for all the good things God has given me today – or do I want to complain instead: "why I was not given this or that", "why did this or that happen to me", "why I this or that was taken from me", or "why didn't I get this or that I really wanted to have."

If you are disappointed or angry or sad, it is good to express the feeling and complain – but that is not what I want to say now. I mean to ask, can I ever get past that

emotional outburst or get over it and then just get on with my life? We humans seem to have an endless skill at complaining and being dissatisfied.

Gladly, our good God is coming to us and He gives us those times of calling and invites us to thank Him again and again in every situation of our lives! To thank Him and our Lord Jesus Christ!

The question remains today: How do you and I respond to God's calling and coming today? It is not good for us to harden our hearts!

Let's pray: Dear Heavenly Father, do not let us harden our hearts, for You are speaking to us. Thank You for coming to us with Your grace and that You let us hear Your call whenever we read or listen to Your word. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that we will hear and understand Your words properly and will repent of our sins. Give us the power of Your Holy Spirit to forgive one another. Give us also the power to forgive everything that we have been asked for without conditions; just as You forgive us unconditionally, by grace alone, for the sake of Your beloved Son Jesus Christ. Thank You for being with us and taking care of us every day. We thank and pray for this in the name of Your dear Son, our Lord, Amen.