

WHEN GOD SAYS 'NO'

And Other Radio Addresses

by
Paul Hutchens

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

HEY, FRESHMAN! WHERE YOU GOIN'?

THAT was the day I first began to live, - that November day away back when - the day my green freshman cap was converted into a crown. The fire kindled within my heart then has been burning ever since, sometimes only smouldering, I must shamefully admit, but more often flaming at white heat for the One Who that day became my very life.

"Hey, Freshman! Where you goin'?"

Many a time I'd had that question tossed at me by some upper classman. If my answer chanced to be "Nowhere," I'd sometimes continue going "nowhere" carrying that upper classman's typewriter or suitcase, or running an errand for him.

I remember many a snake dance when we would line up on the athletic field after a victory and make our way noisily across the campus, a long, twisting, shifting parade of yelling college men (boys, the citizenry dubbed us). On one occasion our line of march took us down into the heart of the shopping district. All traffic on our line of march was interrupted that night as we were given right of way by a tolerant public. We finally wound up by snaking our way toward the flaming marquee of a downtown theater, we followed our yell leader inside and down a dark aisle to the stage. A brief moment later, bedlam was turned loose, as we informed all and sundry that we, the invincibles, had won another epoch-making football game. Our pep leader leaped upon the stage in front of the footlights amidst a dozen or more dancers who were clad in pink and nothing. Gesticulating wildly, he led us in a series of yells that shook the building as we vociferated our own glory to our little world.

I have recalled this particular event because it helps me to re-think those old days so full of activity and innocuous enthusiasm.

I was in the whirl, doing great things, feeling tremendously, following. Going with the crowd, not knowing then that ninety-eight percent of all persons are followers. Less than two percent are leaders.

Leaders, however, must also be followers, if not of a person, then of a philosophy which in turn has been generated in the mind of a person. I needed a Person, someone to follow, Someone also to live within me, to control me, to dethrone the me that required so much worship in those days. I needed a key-note around which the thousand and one activities of my life might cluster and without which there could be no true harmony.

Busy, - playing, studying, working Scrubbing floors, pushing vacuum cleaners, raking leaves, emptying wastebaskets, washing windows, stoking the furnace, sweeping the walks. My room was in Prexy's house where it was my doubtful privilege to do all these things. I also ran errands.

It was while I was returning from an errand to the corner grocery for Mrs. Prexy that the thing happened, that I met the man who taught me the secret of true living, who set me going upstream.

As I walked back up National Road toward College Avenue and toward house number 228 where I roomed, there drew near and walked beside me a stranger, remindful to me now of the two who one day walked the Emmaus Road from Jerusalem, when the Stranger of Galilee drew near and walked and talked with them, and their hearts burned within them.

This stranger, I learned afterward, had made it a habit of life to introduce men to CHRIST, to sow beside all waters, trusting the Lord of Harvest to give the increase. As I recall it, he asked me three courteous questions as we walked the two or three short blocks that afternoon.

The first question was, "Well, young man, what are you going to make of your life? What are you going to do after college?"

My answer, surprising even to myself was, "I don't know. They tell me I'm going to be a minister." Nobody had actually told me that. I had merely heard that some of my friends in the old church back home had said that of me, "Paul will probably become a minister."

My stranger-companion already had his foot in the doorway of my heart, for interest in others is the open sesame to confidence and friendship. As someone has tersely put it: "To be interesting, you must be interested."

"A minister? That's fine. How long have you been a Christian?"

How long? No one had at any time in my life discussed spiritual things with me. How long? I didn't know. I answered my interrogator something like this, "I guess maybe I've always been a Christian," not knowing that that reply was a stock answer, used by nearly everyone who has been brought up in a good home and in the church.

I knew several things about my religious self. I knew that there had been a time in my early boyhood when I had of my own accord, without instruction from anyone adopted the habit of kneeling at my bed at night and praying. I knew that I detested swearing, and that generally speaking I observed the ten commandments. I had no bad habits. My mother was a Christian and sang in the church choir where I had attended Sunday School regularly from my boyhood.

I was a member of Christian Endeavor and took occasional part by reading prepared articles and sometimes by saying sentence prayers. At the age of twelve I had united with the church, was considered by those who knew me to be a good boy. Yet I had no definite knowledge of salvation nor did I know that it is possible for a man to know.

My new friend, adept at fishing for men, saw that I had stolen his bait so he tried again, saying, "I mean, When were you born again?"

I know now that he had entered into the central room of my need, for our Lord Himself has taught us in unequivocal language, "**Except a man be born again he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.**"

I knew nothing of the new birth. At any rate, I had no clearly defined conception of it. My reply was honest as I said, "I don't know. I don't know whether I've been born again." His language was foreign to me.

A man that "knows not and knows that he knows not," needs to be taught, and that is what my chance (?) acquaintance proceeded to do in the few minutes of our short walk together.

At College Avenue we turned south, and stopped half way down the first block, directly across the street from Prexy's house. I must hurry on with my basket of groceries, for Mrs. Prexy wanted them at once. Soon also it would be time for dinner at the college dining-room across the campus.

In my companion's hand was a small leather-bound New Testament, which a second later was opened to the third chapter of the Gospel of John. Verses three and seven were read to me - rather as I recall it, I was asked to read them for myself.

And now I must hurry on, and he, like Philip of old, must be found elsewhere. I turned, crossed the street, having made the stranger a two-fold promise which was to be immediately acted upon: first, I was to read these two verses immediately upon reaching my room, and second, I was to kneel and pray something like this, "O GOD, if I have never been born again as Thy Only Begotten Son has taught, I would like to be right now! I want to make sure of my salvation."

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Inside, I crossed the soft deep rug to the stairs, following the ivory-white balusters up to my room. My roommate was out and because I had no Bible of my own, I borrowed his, opened it with a certain feeling of awe, saw in the back an artist's conception of Calvary. I saw our Lord hanging between the two thieves, saw the agony expressed on his face and felt within me something indescribably tender. No doubt there was mingled with my emotions, a vein of sympathy for Him Who had suffered there; but of one thing I am sure, -I realized that somehow, not yet understood by me, He had let Himself be hung there for Paul Hutchens, the sinner needing to be born again. His suffering had something to do with my salvation.

I realize now that my theology was a bit awry, that is, I was certainly in the infant stage in my understanding of spiritual truth.

One thing I did know, however, and that was that I needed GOD,- just how much, I am still learning day by day.

Below the full-page artist's reproduction, was the abbreviation, I.N.R.I., JESUS of Nazareth, King of the Jews,- or else it was written above the cross, where I now know Pilate had had it written.

In any event, I knew I needed a Saviour.

There was an experience known as the new birth which could unite me vitally to GOD, the Creator of the universe. That experience was an absolute necessity for all men, or they would be forever lost - were already lost. Just how lost I was, I did not know. I think at that time I did not realize that fact at all. A man can be saved from some catastrophe and not know until afterward that he was so near to violence. I must have felt rather than clearly thought all these things, for I had had very little Bible teaching of the truth of Salvation by Grace through faith.

I turned from the open Bible, after carefully reading the verses as I had promised the stranger, and a moment later I was on my knees beside my bed praying. I do not know now what I said, nor did I pray long. I do know this, that I asked the GOD who had made me to give me the new birth. I told him, "O GOD, I do not know whether I am a true Christian, whether I have been born again, but I wish to be sure now . . ."

A man can fly higher on the wings of prayer than in an airplane; he can, as my friend Maurice Dametz says, "see farther through a tear than through a telescope."

That moment I regard as the time when the Lord JESUS CHRIST began to be very real to me. After that, there was daily prayer, and times of meditation. Soon after that He gave me a Christian friend, who one night in his room, suggested that we pray together. That too, was a climactic experience, and I went home to my room seeing farther than ever before. No one in all my life up to that moment had ever asked me to pray with him; in fact, I had not known any young men who prayed with each other.

Looking back over my experience in life, I recall my simple boyhood faith in the great and mighty GOD, to Whom I prayed,- at night before retiring, out in the woods along old Sugar Creek (home of the original Sugar Creek Gang), the times when I dreamed of some day doing something great for Him, - I think of the time when an evangelistic appeal in a church used to stir my boyish heart and make me feel GOD's presence, and I wonder, from GOD's side, just when Paul Hutchens first became a Christian, just when I was born again. I think I can say honestly, "I do not know WHEN," but with many I am able to say sincerely, "**I know WHOM.**" Without Him, and the sense of His presence, "Sweet sunshine, sweet birds and sweet flowers have all lost their sweetness to me."

Since that day, I have learned one secret and that is to practice His Presence each day.

That, I discover, can best be done by beginning the day with some portion of His Word, and staying with it, memorizing it if necessary, analyzing it certainly, and meditating upon it until it begins to glow. Start each day with a sunrise of my own, with CHRIST my Sun, and His Word by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the Light.

I know now where I am going.

I cannot fail to get there, for HE has gone on to prepare the place. Most of all, and perhaps most interesting and appealing to youth today, is the fact that I am not only going somewhere, but I am getting somewhere NOW. I'm there, now. I am in Him. I have found the true purpose for which I was created and that is to live joined to Him in a vital union.

I sing not only, "I Need Thee," but as Northcote Deck of London has expressed it, "I HAVE Thee, Ev'ry Hour."

THE END

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