

## **Hello? Hello?**

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Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (2023\_12-10)

Good morning.

We're really glad you're here. As Rusty mentioned, we are excited to see our members here, and we have some visitors this morning. We are especially glad that you could be here with us. We thank you for your attendance this morning. Jim, thank you for that prayer. I could listen to Jim pray like that for a very long time. I appreciate those heartfelt words.

And Jeff, thank you for the song, "God Is Calling Yet." We don't sing that enough, but that will give you a little bit of insight into our lesson this morning. John and Eddie, thank you for the opportunity to stand up here and preach this morning. I always appreciate that opportunity and recognize the responsibility that comes with that. So, thank you both very much for that.

[Bryan's cell phone rings. He pauses his lesson to answer his phone.]

Excuse me. "Hello, hello?"

[A long moment passes by.]

You know that's not a real call, right?

So, I'm going to start with a question, if I don't have your attention already. What do YOU do when your phone rings? It's not a trick question. How do you answer the phone?

It may depend on who is calling. Most of us simply say hello, and if there's a long pause, we may say the title of today's lesson. "Hello? Hello?"

We could also title today's lesson "Answering God's Call." God is Calling. Yes.

If you have your Bibles, turn to Isaiah, chapter six and verse eight. We'll read that in just a moment.

You know, we have something today that has only been in existence for the past twenty years or so. And it is this technology called "Caller-ID." Do you remember not having Caller-ID? Most of us who are here probably remember it. There may be a few of you that can't imagine a world without Caller-ID, but for most of my life we didn't have Caller-ID.

So how do you feel when you see the name of the incoming caller? It depends, right? When I called John last week, I believe he answered and said, "Well, hello Brian." Very personal. He knew who was calling him and was gracious enough to take my call.

I received a couple calls last week that had no name, but rather my phone screen said, "Spam Caller." Do you ever receive those? How likely are you to answer those calls? There are some people, maybe, that would answer to have the conversation. But most of us would decline. I received a call last week that said, "Political Call." What do you think? Do you think I accepted the call? I declined.

Isaiah, the great prophet, in chapter six verse eight said, "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'whom shall I send and who will go for us?' And then I said, 'here am I, send me.' Send me. What a great example of Isaiah answering God's call.

You know, we may assume that everyone around the world answers their phone by saying "hello," or hello in their own language. But that's really not the case at all. In fact, other countries have very different ways of answering the call. If you live in Mexico, you may say, "Bueno," which means well or good. If you lived in Russia, you would pick up the phone and say, "I'm listening." In France - a little more direct. You say, "Who's on the phone." In Italy, you just answer and say, "Ready," as to say, "go ahead." In Spain, you say "Alo." In Portugal, you say, "I am here. Many in the UK say "Hiya." I've heard Sue, sitting over there, say "Hiya." I've even heard people answer with the last four digits of their phone number as though you didn't know what you just dialed. Some, in Germany, simply say their last name.

So, people around the world answer calls very differently. And just as there are many different ways of answering the phone, there are also different ways to answer God's call. And this is what we're going to look at for a few moments this morning. The Bible gives us some instruction and some examples regarding how to answer God's call.

We'll begin by looking at, first, "what IS God's call? There is some confusion, maybe, that people have about what it actually means to receive a call from God. We'll look at some Bible examples of those who answered the call and how they responded when they received that call.

And then finally, we'll close with the options that we have today with God's call. How have we responded? How will we respond?

So, let's start with "what IS God's call?"

Some may say, well, I received a vision from God, or God called me secretly, or God spoke to me separately. We have to be very careful with that. I'm not implying that we can't have a communication with God in prayer in different ways from each other. But what the Bible teaches us is that God's call is the Gospel like we talked about in Bible class this morning. God's call is the Gospel; the good news that is God's call.

It's not a call that only says, "come and be baptized," and once you have answered that call, you're good, no more response is needed. Baptism is a big part of the call, yet there is much

more. It's a continual call that keeps coming in, requiring us to keep answering and changing our lives so we can walk more closely in Christ's footsteps.

In First Peter, chapter one and verse fifteen, Peter tells the church, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in your behavior." That admonition is actually an ongoing call. It's not a single event, it's ongoing. Your behavior is to continue to be holy, like the Holy One who called you. And who is the Holy One who calls us? God calls us.

Paul has a number of examples and I just picked a few of them. Paul spoke the gospel. We know that he imparted the gospel; he preached the gospel. And when he preached to those in Thessalonica, we know that they received the Word of God. In First Corinthians, chapter one, Paul tells the church in Corinth in verse nine, "God is faithful through whom you were called into fellowship with his son Jesus Christ, our Lord." We were called, Paul told them and tells us. We are the church.

At Ephesus, in Ephesians, chapter four and verse one, Paul again writing says, "therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." So again, it's not a single event, it's a walk, it's a journey. And so, to truly answer God's call, our behavior and our manner must be worthy of the calling with which we have been called.

I love this one. In First Thessalonians, chapter five, and verse twenty-four, "Faithful is he who calls you and he also will bring it to pass. So, faithful is the one who calls you, and we are to be certain that he will call. He WILL call you.

In Second Thessalonians, I'll read two verses here, in chapter two and verses thirteen and fourteen. "But we should always give thanks to God for you." This is Paul writing to the church. "Brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the spirit and the faith and truth." Now, we understand that "chosen" doesn't mean that they didn't have a choice. It means that God's plan chose the way for them. And then in verse fourteen, "it was for this that he called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." When Paul told the brethren to walk worthy of God who calls you, and told how God had called them, it wasn't individually through a vision or through some secret conversation. The brethren were called through God's word. The Word of God. The gospel is how he called.

And for us today, the gospel is God's call. It's a call to obey in baptism. Certainly, we all understand this, and most of us here have been baptized. We understand that we sometimes refer to the call as the steps of salvation. We understand that we have to turn from our sin. We have to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized to walk anew. Certainly, that is a call we read of that many times throughout the Bible. We have examples in the gospel of Christian men

and women who became Christians after they obeyed the gospel through baptism. But the key this morning, and what I really want us to think about, is not the call to be baptized if you have already been baptized. I think almost all of us in this room have been baptized. I want us to think about the ongoing call for us to serve and obey throughout our life. And for me, definitely, the harder part is answering the call throughout life to walk in a worthy manner and to let our behavior be worthy of God's call.

So, what about some examples in the Bible? How did some of God's people answer the ongoing call? We'll look primarily at Old Testament examples. And I also have one from the New Testament.

I love the passage in Isaiah that we read. Maybe the most impactful example to me is when God called and Isaiah said, "Here am I. Send me." "Send me; I am yours God." "Send me to do your work."

How about Jonah? Do you remember the story of Jonah from the Bible? Jonah answered the call by saying, not "here I am, send me," but rather, "here I am, and I'm not going." "And God said to Jonah," In Jonah, chapter one and verse one, "arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and call out against it for their evil has come up before me." Jonah rose. Step one. Good so far. But step two did not go well, for he fled in the opposite direction toward Tarsus. Verse three of chapter three finds Jonah fleeing from the presence of the Lord. If Jonah had had a cell phone at the time, he would have blocked God's number and said, I'm not taking this call. Don't be like Jonah.

Consider Moses. This one might surprise you, especially given our conversation this morning. Moses answered the call initially, if you remember, but then said, "here I am, send someone else." Do you remember when God came to Moses in the burning bush and said, "come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt?" But then, in Exodus, chapter three and verse ten, demonstrated his reluctance to accept that call and eventually said, in chapter four and verse thirteen, "my Lord, please send someone else." Lord, what you've got in mind is a great plan. I just don't think it is for me. I think someone else needs to answer this call.

Now, we know Moses did eventually answer that call. We know Moses finally obeyed. We know Moses served. But think about it. Even though the finish was great for this man of faith, compare Moses' initial response to that of Isaiah. It was not, "here I am, send me." Or to that of Jonah. It was not, "here I am but I'm not going. Instead, Moses said, "Here I am, but send someone else. I am not worthy of this."

Let's compare Moses' response to Abraham's. We talked about that a little bit in Bible class this morning. Abraham answered, and remember what he did? He left his home immediately. Mm-

Hmm. He answered the call and he immediately obeyed. Just like Isaiah, who answered, “here am I, send me.” This is our theme for this morning. This is going to be our theme text this morning. “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us? And then I said, here am I. Send me.”

Remember when Jesus called the first disciples in Luke, chapter five and verses one through ten? What were they doing when Jesus called them? They were working. They were at work. They were fishing. In fact, they had just had, perhaps, the greatest haul of their lives in their profession. Jesus called them. And we know that sometimes when this call comes in, it may not be convenient. They were at work. Most of us work. What happens when a call comes while you are at work? It's a little different today. I mean, you can maybe take some calls at work, whereas many years ago, you couldn't. I think about Frank, engaged in heavy, dangerous work using highly technical equipment. Can you imagine? What if I called and said, “Hey, how's it going?” Sometimes when you are called at work, it's not convenient to be interrupted. That is our main mindset, “I can't be interrupted.” I think there's a reason that God called these men at work, while they were working. When God called the disciples, they dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus.

There's a lot more examples. These are just a few. But how will YOU answer the call? Will you be like, Isaiah, who said, “I am here, send me.” Will you be like Moses, who said, “I believe in your call. But just not me. Please pick someone else. I can't teach. I can't lead a prayer. I can't preach, I can't ... ‘fill in the blank.’ I'm all for it but pick someone else.” Or, will you be like Jonah, who blocked God's call?

All right, what are our options when WE receive God's call? What are our options? And let me remind you that it is not just one call that you might miss, or you might choose to reject. Or one call that you accept, and you become a Christian in baptism, and that's it. It is a continual call. I don't know how many of you use these, the iPhones or Samsung phones. I'm not as familiar with the Samsung, but when I received that anonymous call earlier, I had three options on my screen. Do you know what those were? The first one is a green button, and it says “accept.” That is all it says. And that means that when that call comes, I am willing to accept the call. There is a big red button. And what does the word on the red button say? It says “decline.” Many, many, many in the world decline God's call. They just simply say, “no.”

Pam reminded me of something I had forgotten. There is actually another button, and that's a button that says, “send to voicemail.” Ah, some of you have done that to ME I think. What does that mean? Well, it may mean, like Moses, “I'm interested in the message. I'm interested in your call, but now is just not a convenient time for me. I'm too busy or I'm not worthy. I am not worthy of God's call.” I really believe this is why throughout God's word, he highlights not only imperfect people, but full-blown sinners who he has chosen to carry out his work.

We didn't spend a lot of time talking about Rahab, who was mentioned in Bible class this morning, but people like Rahab throughout the Bible were folks, sometimes rough folks. I think about Peter. He was unpolished. Thomas, a bit judgmental; a doubter. Think about all of the people God used in his plan who were imperfect. How about Saul, who later became Paul? Not only was he imperfect, he was a murderer of Christians. He killed God's people, yet God saw fit to call him to follow his will. Paul accepted that call. So, imagine how God can use someone like you or someone like me.

He has, I believe, demonstrated and preserved all these examples for us so that we can understand that when God calls, no matter what you have done in your past, it doesn't matter. There are some stories in this very room that would probably make all of us blush. It doesn't matter, because when God calls, he can use you. So, if you have the idea that you're going to send God's call to voicemail because you think you are not worthy, get over it. It is a flawed way to think about it.

Suppose God is calling, and we answer it. We could hit the green button and we could say, "I'm just not interested. I will listen to your call, God, uh, but I'm just not interested." A lot of people do that. There may be some here this morning who ARE doing that. They take the call. They kind of pretend that they are listening. Maybe they even pretend that they're obeying. But they are not truly answering God's call.

And then there are those who answer the call and obey. In Matthew, chapter eleven and verse twenty-eight, Jesus said, "come to me." What's he saying here? Does he say, "all of you who are rich and healthy and happy?" No! That's not what he says. "Come to me," he says, "all of you who are weary and burdened, sick, poor, unhealthy, lonely, sorrowing, grieving, those who have guilt, those who have mental sickness, those who have addiction, those who have hate in their heart, those who have all sorts of worldly burdens." The call of Jesus is for those who are weary and burdened. And I think sometimes, especially today in the Lord's Church, that we think it is just this perfect group of perfect people who have perfect, perfect lives, who have no struggles and no sins, that are being called.

That is not what the Bible says. That is not what Jesus says. So, the question this morning is, "are YOU answering God's call?" Are you fully answering and obeying God's call? And I will just remind you, unlike this cell phone where you can just try to ignore God's call by declining it, his call is still there. He still calls you.

You can ignore it, you can decline it, you can send it to voicemail, but God is still calling you, just as we have seen this morning.

I'd like for you to consider how you, how I, can fully answer God's call and be able to say, "God, my life is yours. Whatever you want, wherever you lead, here am I send me."

Thank you for your time.

We are now going to offer the invitation of Christ and will sing a song to encourage those who maybe have not answered that call or are ignoring God. Someone may need to answer God's call to put on Christ in baptism. Someone may have fallen away and stopped answering God's call. It may be something of a private matter where you need to repent and pray and ask God for forgiveness. Or it may be of a public nature in coming before us as well as going to God in prayer.

We want to continually give God our life and be able to say to him, "here am I, send me."

If we can help you in any way, please let us know as we sing the song.