

## ANSWERING THE CALL

The Gospel reading today tells the story of the calling of a few of the disciples with an emphasis on Nathanael. However, I would like us to also take a look at the calling of Samuel.

The stories in these verses contain principles for all of us who walk on a spiritual path. Because each and everyone of us **is called** by God to do ministry. Frequently, in Sunday morning bulletins many churches will list the pastor and his or her name, and then there is a statement “ministers - all the people”. In Ephesians 4:12 “it is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.” That verse is followed by that beautiful image of the church as a body functioning with all its parts – which includes you and me. As part of the body called Centennial, we each have a part in order that we can function as God's presence on earth.

**How do we know that we, personally, have been called and what for?** By looking at Samuel's call we can discover answers to the questions. Now we never want to box God in, because God doesn't fit in any of our boxes! What we will discover from looking at these verses containing the stories of Samuel and Nathanael are biblical truths that apply to any call of God, but the details of their callings are unique to them just as our calling is unique to us. Reverend Cotton and I were called into ministry, but in much different ways and times. It is still God calling and if we sat down and chatted there will be similarities as well as differences.

**The first thing** we can observe in both stories today is that both did not really recognize, at first, who was calling and they had to discover who exactly was calling. There was a time when someone called you on the phone you really did not know who was calling unless you recognized their voice - because believe it or not there was no such thing as caller ID!!! Despite both situations, God finds them as they are, and right where they are at the time.

God does not wait until we are perfect to call us! **How many down through the years has He called who were nowhere perfect?** He called Paul when he was Saul persecuting his people; he called Moses from a high and lofty position. God called a young girl, Mary, to bear his son. He called a doubter, Thomas, who became one of his great missionaries. Perfection is not one of the qualifications for being called by God. *I can personally guarantee that one!!!!*

In these two instances of Samuel and Nathanael in our readings today, God displays no age discrimination as Samuel is just a boy and Nathanael was already an adult. God has called older - Abraham and younger – Timothy. In all these examples God came to those he called where they were,

but in very different places and situations. God called them exactly where they were at that time in their lives. However in every situation whether it was Samuel, Nathanael, or you and me, one has to discover it **is** God calling!!

To discover whether it is indeed God calling, we may need help just as Samuel and Nathanael both did. Samuel had Eli, one who had experience with the call of God. In the other instance, Phillip helped Nathanael as he already had been called by Jesus. Remember when Paul was called he had been blinded. Ananias, called by God in a vision, was part of the plan to help in the restoration of sight to Paul so that he could go forward according to God's call. In many cases of God's call there maybe someone else used to help us fully realize the call.

There are examples in the New Testament of people not recognizing or understanding their call by God. That is why we have the body of Christ, a community of believers, who can help each other. However, we can't help if we ourselves don't understand! That is the reason for Bible Study and preaching, so we together can discern the call of God has on each and every one of us.

We know of numerous verses that we are called out, chosen for his purposes...in *Romans 8:28-30* – “*and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to [his] purpose*” or *1 Peter 2:9* in part “*...for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light*”. In the body of Christ we are **all called for some purpose, we are not here just to take up space!!!**

Now once Samuel or Nathanael realized, or had discovered, it was God's call on their life it was **now decision time**. God does initiate the call, but he leaves it up to us with our free will to make that decision whether or not to answer his call. *Since my late teens I ignored, resisted or whatever the call of God*. It is amazing how God shows us a glimpse of his perfect patience toward us. God is good!!!!

Samuel received help from Eli in the form of how to answer God's calling. Samuel was in the temple, because his mother, barren, had cried out to God for a son, and she vowed to dedicate that son to him. Still, Samuel had in answering the call make a decision to serve God. Nathanael too had to make the decision, simple as it was, to get up and come to Jesus and when he did he knew Jesus was God's son.

When we get up and come to Jesus when we have been called we begin a relationship and our life is never the same again. Could it be that for some of us, that's the very reason we choose not to answer God's call on our lives?

God's desire is for us to be in relationship with him and his son, Jesus Christ. For out of that relationship of love, grace, and forgiveness we feel called in our heart and in our spirit to serve others in thankfulness for that which God has shown us time and time again. Remember too each and every one of us must make a decision one way or the other, no one can make it for us, help yes, but it is our decision alone.

Once we have made that decision to answer the call it becomes a life-long journey. We are never the expert; we are forever the student, the disciple of our teacher Jesus Christ. Faith grows in a relationship like no other we have. Step by step we grow in spiritual maturity and manifest the fruits of the spirit, and are becoming more Christ-like. One of my favorite verses at this stage of my life points the way in *2 Corinthians 4:16* *“that's why we are not discouraged. No, even if outwardly we are wearing out, inwardly we are being renewed each and every day”*.

Making the decision to answer God's call on our lives for many is not an easy decision and for some they may never answer that call. However, I stand before you this morning and affirm to you that no matter what may happen along the way, God is always there, and such a life lived will make a difference to those who were touched by your life. A line from the poem *the dash*: *“for that dash represents all the time that they spent alive on earth. And now only those who loved them know what that little line is worth”*.

Briefly I just mentioned the last ingredient or part of answering God's call – **action**. Once we recognize his call, make the decision to answer it, and then there must be actions by us. When we are in a relationship with Christ each step of the journey on our spiritual path should lead to action. We are that vessel to bring God's love, grace and forgiveness to others by example. In the Epistle of James the well-known verse – *“faith without works is dead”*, so too is a call from God answered without action.

Is it easy to answer the calling, not really? Samuel is told by God a message that no one will want to hear. Samuel is even told that God will go against Eli's house. Then not much after that Eli pleads with Samuel to hear the words of the Lord. Answering God's call can lead to difficult times, and may involve setting ourselves apart from others.

Mark Twain is supposedly quoted as saying *“it's not the parts of the bible i don't understand that bother me, it's the parts I do understand”*. The truth is there and many times people don't want to hear the plain truth, even if it is for their own good. However, if we do not spread truth, then who will? Nathanael the Apostle did and eventually it cost him his life, but he brought the truth to lands that had not heard the truth of the Gospel before that time.

We have told the stories of a few well-known people of the Bible – Samuel and Nathanael and their calling. There are many, many more who have been called, decided to answer that call and took action. The truth is we all have been called by God to be a witness, an example for those around us.

Make no mistake. God does not care about your age. Are you as old as Moses or as young as Samuel? God has called you. Are you male? Are you female? It makes no difference, for God has called you. God has called you as he called Moses and Mary. God calls you regardless of your race, regardless of your talents, regardless of your poverty, regardless of your wealth. God calls you regardless of your strengths, regardless of your weaknesses. God has called you because you are his sons and his daughters.

The way God calls individuals is as varied as the individual, yet the call is always personal and the end is the always the same. In very rare occasions, this is done in a dramatic way as it was to Moses. More often, however, God comes as he did to Samuel. Most often, God comes to us in a quiet whisper, for as God himself said, *“be still and know that I am God.”*

Remember, no matter how God reveals himself, the calling is one and the same. God has called you to serve him. God has called you to be a disciple. This calling—to be a disciple—is as great as the call of Moses and as profound as that of Mary’s. Therefore, go and respond to God’s call. Open up your hearts and allow God to enter and as you leave here today.

And every day, remember to pray the words of Samuel, *“speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”* Amen.