

The Stroke of God

by John Follette

John Follette's sermon explores the transformative power of God's stroke in the lives of believers, emphasizing the importance of faith over physical senses.

Scripture: Psalm 39:10, Isaiah 53:4, Luke 10:19, John 6:26, John 14:11, 1 Corinthians 6:20

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Wright Follette preaches about the transformative power of being struck dumb by God, emphasizing the blessings that come from surrendering to His will and experiencing the rapture of faith that elevates the soul to heavenly realms. He delves into the concept of God's stroke, focusing on the ultimate stroke of judgment at Calvary and the ongoing work of sanctification in believers. Follette highlights the importance of being blind, deaf, and dumb to the things of the world in order to walk by faith and experience true spiritual growth and victory.

Transcript

Struck Dumb

Struck dumb by God! how cruel seem the words

And yet thrice blest the heart where falls the blow

for life transformed is his who suffers thus,

For it is given only such to know

The rapture of the mighty wings of faith

Which elevate the soul to realms above,

Where pain is sweet and wounds give only joy.

His soul is charmed----a captive held by love.

No more to trace the path by signs he sees,

Be they beneath the noonday sun most clear--

Or dim because at dusk the shadows fall.
For blinded thus by God he knows no fear.
His eyes are closed, and yet his vision fills
With things celestial in transcendent light.
The glory of the unseen world is his
Whom God makes blind to earth's fair day or night.
His ears are deaf, no longer does he hear
Earth voices calling him from every side.
It matters not how sweet and clear they be--
Or rough with threats--he does not turn aside.
To every sound made deaf--that he might hear
The music of the infinite and know
The harmonies of God, for such are his
Whom God makes deaf to voices here below.
Struck dumb! no longer is there gift of song,
A silence fills his soul serene and deep.
The music of his lips is wasted breath;
In place of song 'tis given him to weep.
His trembling lips are mute----and yet they speak,
Healed now to sing because they kissed God's rod.
The song must live since it is born from death.
Thrice blest indeed the man struck dumb by God.

-- John Wright Follette

"Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand." Psa. 39:10

We have in the text before us a part of a prayer of David. Under severe pressure and trial, when reason was unable to discern the purpose of the stroke, and faith was too feeble to trust, he cried out in distress, "Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand." It is not my object to treat this verse textually and confine the message to God's personal dealings with the Psalmist, and perhaps trace out reasons why the Lord should desire to consume his strength. But rather let the text serve as a

theme, "The Stroke of God." To many hearts no doubt this thought is not pleasing. God is revealed in His Word as a God of love and so the thought of His hand falling with a stroke upon one of His children may seem strange or even unkind. For this reason I trust the interpretation given in this message may help to clear the vision, quiet fears, subdue too quick judgment and inspire faith to trust an all-wise and tender Father.

The first thought suggested by these words, The stroke of God, no doubt brings to us the scene of Calvary. The rugged cross rises before us and again the story of God's judgment upon sin flashes across our minds. I trust it is so. For the first and supreme interpretation of these words centers here. God is holy--He hates sin. With no degree of complacency or shadow of compromise can He look upon it. Holiness and hatred of sin, like every other attribute, are living and active and must manifest themselves. His holy wrath at sin must strike. So to save humanity and to bring us to God, Christ not only bore our sins but He became sin that we might enter into salvation. He became the victim upon which the divine wrath, the judgment of God, struck. This is the story of the cross. The picture of Calvary is given to us in prophecy: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isa. 53:4, 5).

The literal translation for the Hebrew, hath laid upon (v. 6) is, caused to strike upon. Therefore in considering the stroke of God upon the hearts of His children let us not confuse it with the thought of His judgment upon sin. Christ has successfully and satisfactorily met the judgment for our sins and paid in full the penalty required by the justice and holiness of God.

But there is another sense in which to consider this theme. It is not in relation to the sin question or the sinner, but has to do with the saints and especially those who are seeking deeper fellowship and conformity to the likeness and image of Christ. "Struck dumb by God," were the strange words the Spirit brought to my heart over and over again as I was pondering this thought in relation to the saints.

In the natural we have all seen the unfortunate people whom we speak of as deaf, dumb and blind. The physical deprivation of hearing and sight is indeed a calamity. How thankful we should be that we are given the proper use of all our faculties! But thank God, today we are hearing of His marvelous work of healing power and many who have hitherto never seen, heard or spoken are being healed, and in answer to prayer and faith are entering upon the use of all their faculties. Such occurrences are indeed miracles and are truly wonderful to witness.

For a little while let us consider our spiritual natures and one of the many miracles God is performing for us in this realm of the soul and spirit. Do you know that the greatest miracles of God have not necessarily to do with the physical life? Such miracles as the healing of the deaf, dumb and blind and other marvelous works, because they are in the realm of the physical, appeal to the natural man and arouse unusual attention. The natural man desires to hear, see and feel, consequently the spectacular has a wonderful fascination for him. It excites his sense of wonder and amazement and leads him to delight and rejoice in the strange and unusual manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This condition is not only common today where the Lord is pouring out His Spirit in miracle working and signs and wonders, but in the days of Christ the same effect was produced. Because the people got their eyes upon the things seen, sought to please and gratify their sense life by the use of miracles, and rejoiced in the power and use of the same, the Lord was led to rebuke them and give them words of correction.

The next day after the miracle in which He fed five thousand the crowd continued to follow the Lord. What was the motive? Was it because of intense hunger for God and seeking of life? Were they starving in heart and longing for the bread of heaven? Not at all. Christ discerned their hearts and knowing the human desire merely to want the things that would appeal to their physical being, rebuked them.

"Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. . . ." (John 6:26, 27).

Let us not deceive ourselves. The fact that thousands press their way to the scene of miracles is no sign that they are hungry for God. Would to God they were! When the miracle fails to lead one past the satisfaction of human hunger or physical relief and does not bring him in touch with the bread of life, it has lost its purpose.

Christ saw the frailty of the flesh and the tendency to rejoice in power when it moved upon the natural, and wrought signs and deliverances unusual and marvelous. Therefore He sought to lift their vision, and to bring them into another realm where they might witness and rejoice in miracles of moral and spiritual value. That is why He speaks as He does in Luke 10:19, 20.

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

The fact that power was given to the seventy to triumph over sickness and disease was truly wonderful, divine! But to triumph over man's nature, his sin and moral condition, was more lasting. Even the sick whom Christ healed died at last. A miracle upon the physical or natural plane is, after all, fleeting and vanishes. Not so in the realm of the Spirit. The miracle wrought every time a soul is born again, or when God by His Spirit triumphs over the old creation and brings a trusting heart into a fuller realization of the divine life, is lasting and endures through the ages to come. To rejoice in the fact that God has touched my physical body and wrought a miracle (which fact is true) is one thing but to know that my name is written in the Lamb's book of life and that I am born of God is greater.

Why is it that it is harder to realize this truth and to enter into spiritual phases of the subject of miracles as Christ desires us to do? Is it not due to the fact that (as Christians even) we are too much creatures of sense? God has given us the body in which we tabernacle or dwell. We are given five senses which act as reporters to us concerning the world in which we live. We see, hear, smell, taste and the natural man conducts his life accordingly, orders his steps and lives what we call the natural or physical life. These senses were in the original purpose of God, no doubt, to act as servants or aids to us, but since the fall, the physical has triumphed until today as a rule, man is held a prisoner to his sense life. This is the hindrance which we have from our ancestors and is sometimes called our old creation. It is governed by sight or the report of our senses.

The spiritual life is supernatural or above the natural. We are now, as Christians, introduced into another realm, elevated by the Spirit on to another plane where faith is the governing law or power. It is the work of the Spirit in our lives today to bring us out from the bondage and control of the old life, physical and natural, and to adjust us to God so that we shall truly live and move and have our being in God, or as the Word says, be seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

This does not mean that we are to become fanatical and disregard the body which God has given us and by unwise rules and extreme and foolish procedure try to extricate ourselves from the natural life with all of its activities. We are to recognize the body as our only vehicle or medium of expression in life. Even Christ bore the human frame. We are to let it serve us as an accommodation while our souls are in training and our spiritual life is maturing for the next age. We are to regard the body and its needs and seek to glorify God in the same. "For ye are bought with a price; there[fore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20). But to let the laws of the natural and the life of the physical dominate is deadly to all spiritual development.

Think you it is a small matter that God is able to take a person born of the earth, bound by its laws, and held under the power of the old creation system, and by His marvelous work of the Spirit so transform him and bring him into the life of the Spirit that he can fellowship with his God? This is indeed a miracle!

In order to do this God must bring us as Christians seeking the deeper life, more and more out from under the bondage of the natural. We are to walk now by faith. Therefore He strikes, as it were, a blow at the sense life. As we yield to the Spirit and walk by faith He delivers us more and more from its control. He seems to delight to make the cross to triumph over every phase of the old creation.

In the beginning in the garden of Eden it was through the sense life that Satan made his appeal to Eve. Of course it was not primarily the physical act of Eve's eating the forbidden fruit which caused the fall. Eve consented in her will and the moment she thus consented, Satan triumphed in the surrender of her soul. The literal act of eating the forbidden fruit was merely the outward expression and enactment of the moral and spiritual failure within. The sense life was the approach--she saw, heard and tasted.

Now, in the deliverance of the cross, the victory consists in triumph over the sense life so that we are no longer moved by its reports no matter what its messages may convey, be they pleasing or threatening. If we are to walk in the new creation and maintain a spiritual life with its proper development, we are to be blind to the things seen, deaf to the voices of earth and dumb as far as speaking our words of judgment are concerned. This is why God seeks to make us, as it were, deaf, dumb and blind. What leaps and bounds God's people would make in the new life were they to yield to God's stroke and suffer the crucifixion of the old life!

In thinking of this theme the Spirit brought to my memory the picture of Christ as the perfect servant. This type of the Lord is so suggestive in connection with this study. Isaiah 42:19, 20--"Who is blind but my servant! or deaf as my messenger that I send? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not: opening the ears, but he heareth not."

Here the Lord is presented to us in a very unusual character. The perfection of the servant lies in the fact that He has suffered the stroke of God and no longer sees, or hears from the human side of life. Never would the Lord Jesus have lived the life of victory and faith filled with its untold pressure, pain, disappointments, burdens, and tragedies had He not been blind to the many things seen by the natural eye. Time is too short to rehearse the different incidents in His life when He saw many things but observed them not. Think of Him in the wilderness in those hours of stress and temptation when the enemy "showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them."

But there was victory! Christ was blind to the appeal of the flesh. And with the eyes of devotion, consecration and faith He looked beyond, beyond, beyond where His vision was filled with the glories of the kingdom to be won through suffering, pain and death. He saw the ultimate purpose of His earthly life

glorious in the effulgence of eternal light. Struck blind that He might see beyond time into the heavenlies, gazing continually at eternal values.

I will mention another time when I am sure He was blind to the things seen. It was at the hour of His departure from the little group of disciples and followers. He had finished His work and poured out His life and now the only means left to carry on the tremendous work of evangelizing the world was a little group of helpless, uneducated and fainting disciples. There was no possible support from the political world, no social eminence to give prestige and influence, no one with money or material schemes---rather a little group of outcasts, despised, rejected and scorned, already showing signs of failure and cowardice.

But again there is victory! Blind to any material hopes or possibilities, Christ lifts up His eyes. Blind indeed! but most powerful in penetration and vision. He was able to leave them in faith because He saw God in the power of the Holy Spirit coming with heavenly life, supernatural power and possessing His followers. He saw them no longer as weak creatures of flesh but now transformed by the grace and power of God. They were the torch bearers of the light of heaven. He saw them scattered and persecuted but as flames burning their way down through the centuries. He saw the material nations rising, falling and perishing; but the light and the life which He had brought, continued to burn and blaze and triumph in unspeakable glory. Blind indeed I but piercing the darkness of centuries.

Christ, the true and faithful servant, was deaf. Time will not permit us to note the occasions when, with ears closed to voices of earth, He moved in matchless grace and victory. Hearing the groan of creation, the taunts of Satan, the suggestions of the flesh, He yet lived in perfect and absolute victory. Even when a voice assumed the tender and attentive tone of affection as expressed by Peter when he sought to spare the Lord the suffering and humiliation which was ahead of Him, He was deaf. "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee." His ears were deaf to suggestions which would hinder His onward movement. The cross was the goal of His earthly pilgrimage and no voice was to call Him aside from the steps which led in the will of God. Or should a voice in anger roar and threaten to frighten and intimidate, it mattered not for He was deaf. Yea, deaf! but so attuned to God that His soul caught the harmonies of heaven and the simplest words or wishes of His Father.

The Lord spoke the words of eternal life and yet at times He was dumb. He triumphed completely over the realm of the sense life. How many times when from the natural He might have with one word silenced the oppressor or vindicated Himself in many ways, He refrained from speaking! Many times He stood the contradiction of sinners, heard the rebukes of those who scorned, and taunts of the enemy, yet the record reads, "And he opened not His mouth."

Think of Him in the garden on the eve of the betrayal. The group of followers sodden in sleep and He alone in silent vigil. Then what an unusual and striking figure He makes in the deep shadow of the olive trees, standing alone, silent, serene and majestic while near at hand was the cowardly, vulgar crowd, pressing upon Him, jeering and taunting Him. The uncertain glare and flickering flame of the torches reveal a majestic personage, undaunted and possessed of heavenly peace. The crowd draws closer but is repulsed. They cower; they slink back, heads down and spiritless.

Again He triumphs! By words? Never ! This is no time for vindication and defense of eloquence! He is silent. Struck dumb! This serves as a most profound rebuke. The effect is so startling that He Himself has to ask their purpose in coming. Dumb! but with a dumbness profound enough to triumph over flesh and hell. This is but a simple and hurried picture of the servant, deaf, dumb and blind, as it were, to triumph

over the natural and make possible a victory for all who let a similiar stroke separate them and bring them into the life of the Spirit.

Many wonder why the transformation, separation and development cause such pain and unrest at times. Many of you may not enjoy the explanation I offer but it is all I know. Where there is life there is movement, be it tremendous or most delicate and simple. Life seeks expression and resents death, that is perfectly natural. When the stroke of God falls upon us and He seeks to blind our eyes that we may walk by faith, we resent it. The natural man wants a sign, a vision, a miracle, and to be weaned from them pains him.

Is it not the voice of the carnal man that says, "Let me see and I will believe"? The new man says, "I believe, therefore do I see." God reaches down, seeking, to put His fingers over our ears lest we might hear sounds that distract us and would at times contradict our faith, but too often we are fearful and cry to hear. Again He lays His fingers upon our lips, (the check of the Spirit, I call it), and again what trouble we have. We feel we must tell this, or explain that. Talk! talk! talk! I do not know of a more deadly influence upon the spiritual life than that of talking. We are too loquacious for our spiritual good. How common it is to hear such expressions as, "Did you hear? Did you see ?" "I heard." "Have you seen ?Do you believe ?" and "Why do you suppose?" This is one way of feeding the sense life and keeping it in a flourishing condition.

I have been surprised at a lack of faith on the part of what we call spiritual people, sanctified and baptized and candidates for translation. I mean a lack of faith in this sense. They seem yet, in a great measure, dependent upon a sign or movement upon the physical or sense life in order to stimulate them to believe God. I am also surprised to see how wonderfully God dares to disappoint them in their seeking.

Over and over again we hear reports from the foreign field that God is working thus and so in marvelous healing upon the raw heathen. Or again in our home country hundreds of people (many times sinners and untaught people) are being healed and delivered. Many and many a time in the same meeting a saint of God who has been seeking healing or deliverance for years, and is no doubt pious and dutiful, cannot seem to get a touch from God; and yet a sinner who knows nothing of the deeper things walks in and at once receives.

I will suggest only one reason for this. The sinner is on one plane--that of the flesh and physican--and God caters to him for there is no other approach; and his faith being simple God knows it and performs, maybe even a miracle. The child of God, seeking a touch, is on another plane. He is saved and has been introduced into the realm of the Spirit. God is now seeking in this child something far greater than mere faith for healing. Healing is not the greatest thing in the experience of the Christian. It may be that God is seeking to do a bit of spiritual disciplining (something the sinner knows nothing about). He does not want to cater to the sense life and deal with His child as a sinner and so does not give him the satisfaction (by way of feelings) that he may have had before. God wants him to believe His Word only and test his faith in the silent places of life.

People classified themselves in this matter in the days of Jesus. John 14:11--"Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." He wanted them to believe His Word first. If some had to have the works it was all right; but these latter belonged to the second class. Even in the matter of tongues---"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not As Christians we should not have to have the same treatment that the sinner gets. I do not mean that the sinner does not have to have faith. Both have to have faith but they are on different

planes and God deals with them accordingly. To believe Him for His Word's sake is what He wants. Therefore He may strike a blow to the sense life of His child and lead him to truly triumph by believing the Word only, when everything in the flesh realm contradicts the statement of truth. The sinner may need a sign to convince and help him on but I think as Christians we are to hold to the naked Word and let our sense life suffer the stroke of God.

In thus dealing with the saint in seeming delays, testings, and trials God is maturing him in the things of the Spirit. He seeks to bring us from the plane of the little child where we have to have every prayer answered at once or a sign or a miracle to coax us along. Why not let Him work a miracle upon us today ? Maybe not a miracle for the physical eye to behold, but no less a miracle and one far more lasting. To deal thus with a babe in Christ would no doubt stumble him, but God is seeking grown-up sons whom He dares to prove, test, and bring into deeper life in the Spirit. Did God deal with grown sons as He does with babes and sinners, with signs and quick answers to prayers--where would the trial, patience, maturing and victory of our faith come in?

Friends, we are in the school of the Spirit. He is working upon us with most infinite and patient care to bring us into a life as far removed from the physical as the Spirit is above the natural. Are we willing? No one in himself is able. It took the power of the Holy Spirit to bring Jesus through in perfect victory. Thank God we have the same Spirit now dwelling in us. Therefore when we feel the stroke of God blinding our eyes, closing our ears, and sealing our lips, shall we not yield?

God is today working a mighty miracle upon His children. It may not find its expression in the realm of the physical in signs and wonders. It is in the realm of the Spirit and is of quite a different character. It requires faith, and that of a superior quality, to suffer the stroke of God needed to close the eyes of the old life and to translate us into the realm of true vision. Maybe the very hindrance today in your development of spiritual life is due to the fact that you are seeing too many things, people, conditions, acts, circumstances, symptoms, etc. If God seeks to lay His hand upon your eyes and does not explain to the satisfaction of your flesh the reasons for so doing, then go blind. Remember, as the vision of the natural leaves, the heavenly dawns. Maybe you are hearing too much. The mind and heart are distressed because they are not able to make a satisfactory reconciliation between conflicting reports. God has not asked you to do so. All He has asked is that He might place His fingers over our ears lest we might be distracted by the sounds; and it is only thus that we hear the voice of God and "the sound of his goings."

Maybe you are too talkative. Many times we take the burden of explaining the universe. It is a waste of breath. Man's words are not used in the realm of the Spirit; the language there is from lips first struck dumb. Let us learn the bliss of silence. As sanctified, yielded Christians, we may well rejoice to know that already the pressure of His hand is upon our lives. God forbid that because we do not recognize its purpose we shall find ourselves praying, "Remove thy stroke away from me; I am consumed by the blow of thy hand." But now discerning the purpose of such a stroke shall we not cherish it and even through tears say, "The good hand of God is upon me."?

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