

Not for Me? Why Not?

by William Edwin Boardman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of boldness and faith in receiving the fulness of salvation, and warns against the plea of 'Not for Me' which is based on unbelief.

Scripture: Exodus 3:4, Judges 4:6, 1 Samuel 3:4, Isaiah 6:5, Zechariah 4:2, Luke 7:6, John 1:47, Acts 2:39, Hebrews 4:16, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Holy Boldness", "Faith And Humility"

Description

William Edwin Boardman preaches about the importance of holy boldness in approaching God, highlighting the need to surrender self-complacency and embrace a deep sense of humility and reverence in His presence. He emphasizes the call to willingly respond to God's invitation with boldness and faith, rather than shrinking back in unbelief or modesty. Boardman uses the examples of Peter at Pentecost, Moses, Barak, and various biblical figures to illustrate how God calls and equips individuals for great and good things, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Transcript

"FOR THE PROMISE IS UNTO YOU, AND TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND TO ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF, EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL."

Peter at Pentecost concerning the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Modesty is lovely, presumption is folly, and pride is madness, but there is a holy boldness which is one of the chiefest of the beauties of holiness.

When the apostles were most supported and engrossed by divine influence, made the very temples of the Holy Spirit, and illumined in every chamber of the soul, then they were boldest, and then their adversaries took note of them that they had been with Jesus.

It becomes even Princes and Kings to take the shoes from their feet in their approaches to God, even when called into his presence by the voice of the Lord himself. It is holy ground, and all self-complacency will certainly give place to a deep sense of pollution in the vision of the spotless majesty of the Most High, and strength itself will wilt into weakness in view of his omnipotence. A Job will exclaim, "I abhor myself." An Isaiah will cry, "Woe is me, I am undone!" A Daniel will feel his "comeliness turned into corruption." A John will fall upon his face as a dead man. No strength will remain in him.

And yet when even a child hears his name called, like the little boy in the Tabernacle lent to the Lord forever by his mother -- "Samuel! Samuel!" Then it is surely more pleasing to God to have the willing response, "Here Lord am I," than the reluctant plea, "Not me, Lord, not me! send by whom thou wilt send, but not me."

The Lord was offended with Moses for his pertinacious modesty when called and bidden to strike for the liberty of Israel from Egyptian bondage. And also with Barak when sent for by Deborah the prophetess, and commissioned to break the iron yoke of Amalek. And in both cases he divided the responsibility, as they desired, and the glory too! In the one instance making Aaron a large sharer with his brother Moses, and in the other giving one part to Deborah, and another to Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, leaving only the third to the shrinking Barak.

God is not well pleased with this shrinking plea of the over modest disciple who says, "Not for me." He has opened the new and living way by the blood of the covenant through the rent veil into the most holy place, and exhorts us in the language of the apostle, "Let us enter in boldly." And it is not modesty but unbelief which puts in this shrinking plea.

"Not for me?" Why not? Why, this is the very plea that the unconverted in their utter unbelief of the freeness of God's grace and mercy urge when dressed to fly to Christ for salvation -- "Not for me." And yet we who have tasted and felt the love of the Lord know how foolish their plea is. We know that the invitation is unto "all the ends of the earth," and to "Whosoever will." And surely salvation is no more free in the first draught of the waters of Life, than in the second and deeper. Christ is no more freely offered in the faith of his atonement, than in the assurance of his personal presence and sanctifying power! He has not given himself to us in half of his offices freely, then to withhold himself from us in the other half. If we are content to take him as a half-way Saviour -- a deliverer from condemnation, merely, but refuse to look to him as a present Saviour from sin, it is our own fault. He is a full Saviour. And to all who trust him he gives full salvation. To all and to each.

"But this is not like conversion," says an objector. "It is a special matter designed and bestowed upon special instruments of God called to special responsibilities. Luther was a great man, called of God for a great work. Baxter also -- Wesley and D'Aubigne. And these great men were endowed with, great faith. I am not like one of these. It would be presumption in me to expect any such measure of faith."

To answer, and silence this plea is very easy -- but to do away with the unbelief that utters it is another matter. How do you know, beloved disciple of Jesus, that the Lord is not calling you to be a special instrument specially endowed for great and good things? Has God revealed to you his plans? Can you say certainly that God has not great things in store for you? Luther, a poor monk, buried up in a convent, without a dollar in the world, or a friend to lean upon, or so much as a Bible of his own to read, might have taken up your plea perhaps with quite as much show of reason as you -- and yet suppose he had? and had persisted in it, and refused to press for the fulness of salvation? Ah! then he might have remained a monk forever, and the honor and glory of the Reformer would have crowned other instruments. So with you. You may shut yourself out from great light and love and usefulness -- you may let another take your crown -- but it will be your own fault, through an evil heart of unbelief if you do. And tell me now -- upon your own admission, that this second version is a power of distinguished usefulness to who secures it, are you not taking too much yourself in rejecting it? Certainly it does make useful as well as happy Christians, and refusing to for it is no slight matter. You had better weigh it well.

WILLIAM CARVOSSO

was left an orphan at ten, and bound 'prentice to a farmer. His father was a sailor, impressed and compelled to serve on a British man-of-war, and his days were ended at last in the Greenwich Hospital. His mother gave him some instruction in the -- to him -- difficult art of reading, when a child, but of writing he knew nothing until he was sixty-five years old. In his youth he was inducted into the mysteries of cock-fighting, wrestling, card-playing, and other like things.

At twenty-one years of age it pleased God to arrest him and bring him to Christ. His sister, just then newly converted, was the means of this. His struggles were great. Satan tempted him, tried him. It was hard to give up the world. Unbelief whispered, "The day of grace is passed: it is now too late." But at last he came to the determination, "Whether saved or lost, never to cease crying for mercy." "And the moment this resolution was formed in my heart," he says, "Christ appeared within, and God pardoned all my sins, and set my soul at liberty. The Spirit himself now bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God."

This was his conversion. For a time all was fair, peaceful, joyous, happy. By and by, however, he discovered a deeper depth of his necessities. In his own graphic simile, "My heart appeared to me as a small garden with a large stump in it, which had been recently cut down level with the ground, and a little loose earth strewed over it. Seeing something shooting up I did not like, on attempting to pluck it up, I discovered the deadly remains of the carnal mind, and what a work must be done before I could be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." What I now wanted was inward holiness."

One night about a year after his conversion, he returned from a meeting greatly distressed with a sense of his unholiness, and turned aside into a lonely barn to wrestle with God; and while kneeling there on the threshing floor he gained a little light, but not enough to burst his bonds and set him free. Shortly after, however, in a prayer meeting, his eyes were opened to see all clearly. "I felt," he says, "that I was nothing, and Christ was all in all. Him I now cheerfully received in all his offices; my Prophet to teach me, my Priest to atone for me, my King to reign over me. O what boundless, boundless happiness, there is in Christ, and all for such a poor sinner as I am! This change took place, March 13th, 1772."

In pencil mark at the bottom of the page, in the memoir from which this extract is taken, a reader has noted "A second conversion precise as to time." This narration, however, is not given simply as an illustration of second conversion, but rather to meet the special pleading "not for me," on the ground that it is a special endowment for eminent ones. I wish to show that it is an endowment to make eminent ones. Often and often in the providence of God, it has taken men from the respectable ranks of mediocrity, or the low walks of obscurity, and lifted them to eminence.

Here is a youth just out of an apprenticeship to a farmer -- a farmer's boy of all work, able to spell out a few words indeed upon the printed page, but unable to write a word or form a letter with the pen. Not an eminent one certainly; and yet he said, "It is for me -- I must have it; and by the grace of God I will." And by the grace of God he did.

And now mark what follows. The fire kindled in that poor boy's heart burned so glowing and so gloriously, that the angel of the Lord took from that altar the living coals to touch the lips and purge the sins of thousands. Carvosso married and became a pilcher fisherman in the obscure fishing village of Mouse-hole on the coast of England -- a fisher of men, too, and few more successful than he. Four months of the year he plied his seine for pilchers, but he caught pilcher catchers the whole year round. Their first chapel was a small room in a fisher's hut; the next an offensive fish-drying cellar; the next a large upper room, made

ready, but so frail as to crumble and tumble and crash, a heap of ruins, under the weight of the first assembly. Numbers grew, and zeal with numbers and ability with zeal, and they built a fine chapel. The whole place was transformed.

Tired of fishing, he became a farmer. The parish where his farm lay was unbroken fallow ground; weeds rank, stones ungathered, fields unhedged, a heath in the desert. Soon, however, under the diligent hand of Carvosso, it began to blossom as the rose. The few scattered sheep grew into three flourishing classes. His hands were full. From abroad they sent for him, and at one place, Cambuslang, where he went from house to house through the day, and held class-meetings at night, seven hundred or more were hopefully converted to God.

For sixty years this farmer boy, made eminent by grace, wrought on. And yet, strange to say, until he was sixty-five years old, the forming of the letter P in his class-book, to mark the presence of the members of his classes, was his utmost effort in the art of writing. His wife used to rally him about penmanship saying, "All you can do is to make P's."

A simple circumstance induced him after he was sixty-five, to make extraordinary effort and learn to write. He mastered the art, and used it too. His letters and his autobiography are quite voluminous and very respectable in style; and, what is more than all, have been first and last the means, perhaps, of more good than his personal labors during all the sixty years of his distinguished usefulness. Comment is needless. Let Carvosso persuade you that faith and grace can raise even the obscure to eminence, while unbelief paralyzes even those distinguished for native abilities and superior opportunities and positions, and leaves them to float along in mediocrity or sink into obscurity.

This upon the assumption of your plea that this is a limited matter. But in fact, this assumption is entirely groundless. Nay, more. It limits God, and God's holy word, and God's boundless grace. Not for me? Why not? Is not Christ able? Is he unwilling? Are the promises limited? Are the commands binding only upon a few? Can any enter heaven without holiness? Is there any other way of becoming holy? Is your name mentioned as an exception in the promises and invitations of the Word? Do you find any such phenomena as a proclamation like this, "Look unto me, ye few, and be ye saved, for I am God?" Or like this, "Whosoever will, let him drink of the waters of life freely -- except yourself?" or like this, "For the promise is, not unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," but only to a few eminent ones, or a few of peculiar temperament, or a few in favorable circumstances?

Favorable circumstances! Not for me! My circumstances, my associations, my calling, my position so unfavorable! Ah, if only I was a minister with nothing to do but to do good, and study how to do it!

Now let another of the Lord's eminent ones witness for him.

HENRY HAVELOCK.*

The gallant soldier and heroic Christian Havelock, was converted on board the "General Kyd," outward bound for India. He was young, and only a lieutenant, with an untried sword both as a soldier and as a Christian, but destined to great deeds in both fields. His enlistment was as hearty under the banner of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as under the lion of Britain, and his commission from the King of Heaven had the broad seal of authenticity in the assurance of sins forgiven, as undoubted and unequivocal as his commission from the King of his country. He landed at Calcutta a soldier of the cross. But there God had in store for him yet better things. It was not in Havelock's nature to hide his colors. His uniform did not

more fully declare his profession a military man, than did his uniform Christian conduct, his position in the Church militant. Once fairly settled at Fort William, he sought out those in Calcutta, distinguished in the service of his own new found Captain and King, and his intercourse with them was greatly blessed. His conversion was on board the "General Kyd." It was then on the high seas that he was met by Him of whom the Psalmist said, "Help is laid upon one mighty to save, whose hand is in the sea." But now in the British Indian Capital, and in the Fortress the same glorious Saviour met him again, and opened his eyes more fully than ever and revealed himself to him anew. His biographer says of this second conversion, that, "The scriptures opened to him in yet greater fulness, and his consecration to his Master's service assumed yet greater intelligence and force."

Now Havelock would have been a distinguished soldier, and a decided Christian without doubt, even if he had not been met and blessed the second time as he was. But to understand the philosophy of his unswerving dauntlessness in religion, and the deep solicitude he felt for the conversion of his soldiers, and of the heathen, to find the source of the steady brilliance of his light, we must look to the two scenes, the first on the "General Kyd," but not less to the second in "Fort William," and see how there the living union was formed, first and then more fully opened, afterward by faith between him and his Saviour, that living union which like the tubes from the living olive trees in the vision of the prophet, poured the golden oil in constant current into the golden lamps, keeping their light ever fresh, never dim. His after life as a man, a soldier, and a Christian, was but the unfolding of the elements then fully set at work, to make him what he was, under the constant presence, and culture, and providence of his Captain and King.

Now suppose Havelock had said in the first instance, as doubtless he may have been tempted to say, and as some of his fellow-officers in the service, and fellow-voyagers in the General Kyd did probably say, "Not for me?" Or in the second instance -- where now would have been the record which has thrilled all Christendom with wonder and delight, the record which is on high? Where? And yet he, a youth, and a subordinate officer, amongst scoffing fellow-officers, and amongst a soldiery not over devout or pure, going into a heathen land, and his trade war, and his profession ambition. Surely he might have exclaimed with a sigh of despair, "My circumstances! Oh, my circumstances! Not for me! not for me! " Yet it was for him, and it is for you too, if through unbelief you do not reject it. Again let me entreat you, weigh it well! Again let me ask you, can you reject it and be innocent.

But my temperament! With my perplexities and trials. Ah! my temperament would never allow me to live in it, if I should gain it." Of all the pleas put in by those already convinced of the reality and blessedness of full salvation, this is the most frequent; and the most plausible too to those who so plead, and yet of all it is the most foolish and groundless.

The plea in all reason and common sense ought to be reversed. It should be. Ah! my temperament and my temptations! I can never live unless I do have the fulness of faith, and the fulness of salvation. I must have it. Whatever others may do who have less to contend with, I must have it, and by the grace of God I will.

To make our very necessities a plea for rejecting instead of receiving it, is against all reason. Just as well might the poor cripple, who can only walk a few steps at a time without falling down, make that a plea for refusing the strong arm of a willing brother who offers to hold him up, and help him on to the end. And just as well might a poor sufferer gasping for breath in a close room, dying for want of air, refuse to have the free air let in, on the plea that he could not breathe with what he had already.

If all was right, temperament and temper, disposition and aim, position and circumstances, no Saviour would be needed. As it is, the more irritable our temperament, and irascible our temper, the more distracting our cares, and the more subtle and powerful our adversaries, and the worse our associations, the more we need a Saviour, and the more we need all the fulness of faith, and salvation.

Says He who walketh in glory amidst the golden candlesticks, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh I will give to sit with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on His throne."

"Rise! touched with love divine,

Turn out his enemy, and thine,

That soul destroying monster, sin,

And let the heavenly stranger in!"

* A friend objects to Havelock as an example, because he was a military man -- a man of blood. And asks, "Can any man be a whole-hearted Christian, and yet a military man? Under the gospel economy of the Kingdom of God can any one deliberately select the profession of arms, or of his own choice remain in it, after his conversion, taking part in the bloody scenes of war as Havelock did, and yet live in the smiles of Divine approbation and love from day to day?"

This is a grave question in ethics, and involves also the still broader one of the allowability of war under any circumstances. Of course in a footnote questions so broad cannot be discussed at large. To answer the objection in a manner the briefest is all that can be thought of.

Is the objection good?

If it is good against Havelock, it is good also against Captain Vicars, Colonel Gardiner and General Burns -- all men of valor, both in the cause of their country, and in the cause of their God.

Nay, more; if good against these, it is equally good against men highly commended in the New Testament for their devotion and faith.

The first Gentile to whom the gospel was preached, as a Gentile, was a Roman military officer, Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Band, stationed at Cesarea, which was then the local seat of government and centre of military affairs for Judea. And the pen of inspiration commends him as devout, liberal, and prayerful, even before the Apostle Peter was sent to preach Christ to him at his house, and informs us that the Holy Spirit fell upon him and his household while Peter was speaking, just as at Pentecost He had come upon the apostles. And yet not one word is said to him, or of him, as if his profession of arms was against the ethics of the gospel.

And the man of all others most highly commended by our Saviour himself for his faith, was also a Roman military officer. He came to Jesus in the streets of Capernaum, and said to him "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof. Speak the word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man under

authority, and I say to one, come, and he cometh, and to another, do this, and he doeth it."

Jesus listened to him. His appeal based its mustration upon his own military power and authority over his soldiers, but our Saviour did not condemn him for being a centurion. He listened with wonder and admiration, and turned him about to his followers saying, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

The presumptive testimony of these facts is altogether against the validity of the objection.

But there is a single thought which is sufficient both to show the baselessness of the objection and the consistency of these facts with the ethics of the gospel, and perhaps also to furnish the principle for the settlement of the general question, whether under the gospel economy there can be a justifiable war?

What are the army and the navy?

Are they not simply a national police?

Are they not to the nation at large -- in principle -- just what the civic police is to the city, and the sheriffalty and constabulary are to the country? The arm of the government for the protection of the honest and the peaceful, and for the arrest and punishment of the vile and the violent?

Is it right, or is it wrong, to have a police force on the high seas for the suppression of piracy and the traffic in slaves? To catch the sharks of commerce, and protect the weak and the exposed?

One thing of two must be. Every merchantman must be armed for self-defence, or the government must defend its merchantmen by a navy.

Is it right for the nation within its own borders to put down conspiracy, enforce its laws, preserve order, and protect innocent citizens?

Is it right to present a bulwark of honest hearts, strong hands and deadly weapons against the invader who comes to rob and destroy, to kill and lay waste?

Then it is right to have soldiers and sailors. And then it is right for some to be soldiers and sailors, and whole hearted ones too, if soldiers and sailors at all.

There is nothing in that to hinder being whole hearted Christians at the same time.

Is there anything wrong in being a justice, or alderman, or mayor, or judge, or governor, or president? No more is there in being a captain, or general or commodore.

Is there anything in the office of our civic police, if discharged honestly, boldly, prayerfully, to grieve the Spirit of God, or cause the frown of the Most High? No more is there in being a soldier or a sailor.

The question concerning any particular war, of course must turn upon the particular circumstances of the case. Each case must be judged of by itself, just as each civil suit, and each criminal prosecution must be separately judged.

Without question there is always wrong on one side if not on both. It could not be otherwise.

But the question concerning the constitutionality of the military under the economy of the gospel turns upon the necessity there is for a national police to hold the lawless, whether amongst nations, or amongst

the separate communities of each nation in check, and for punishing the desperadoes who seek honor or gain at the expense of the honest and peaceful.

Taking this broad view of the subject, we at once see how Havelock, and Vicars, and Gardiner, and Burns could bask every day in the sunshine of God's favor, while at the same time they were honestly and earnestly doing their duty as soldiers, whether in camp, or on the march, or in the heat of the battle.

And we see, too, how the centurions could be commended, as they were, for their extraordinary devotion and faith, while yet they wore the uniform, and bore the commission of Roman military officers.

And we see, also, how John the Baptist could consistently answer the soldiers who came to him as Ike did. Soldiers came to him there on the banks of the Jordan, asking, "And what shall we do?" As if their case was different from that of citizens. Must we abandon the service of Caesar to enter the service of God? was perhaps the substance of their question. So at least the answer of John intimates. John told them to do violence to no man -- accuse none falsely -- and be content with their wages. That is, if you will serve God, the service of Caesar does not stand in your way if you will only not be seditious on account of your wages, nor rob any one, or accuse any falsely to get money, but be true God-fearing soldiers of Caesar at the same time that you are true soldiers of God.

Now, however, turning the tables, if this view is correct and the military profession is lawful and right, judged by the gospel itself, then the example of Havelock remains in full force. He could be, as indeed he was, a gallant hero in the defence of his national flag, and in the rescue of his imperilled fellow-countrymen and fellow-Christians, and also, and more nobly a hero, under the standard of the cross, and in the rescue of immortal souls from a fate more terrible than that of torture or massacre by Hindoo or Mussulman.

And his example is the more brilliant and noble from the fact that he rose above all the temptations of both peace and war, in an army and in a country, where faith and grace are tried to the utmost.

Havelock's is indeed an illustrious example, both from the lustre of his name and the lustre of his course, and from the dark sky out of which his star shone so steadily in its undimmed ever-increasing brilliance.

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