

**READ THE TEXT**

It was a lifetime ago, way back in 1916,  
that a certain strange man began making appearances all over the United States.

He looked to be an OLDER man – with white hair, a fluffy goatee,  
and bushy eyebrows.

He was always dressed in the same odd clothes – striped pants, a loose  
blue coat, a red bow tie, and a top hat with a big blue star.

The most memorable thing of all, however, was his message –  
with eyes staring intently at his audience and a bony finger out-thrust,  
he liked to say,

“I WANT YOU FOR THE U. S. ARMY!”

His name, of course, was Uncle Sam.

Though he lived only in cartoons and on posters, he was a compelling figure!

Many people answered his call and enlisted in the army  
during World Wars I and II.

This morning, I am here to issue you a similar SUMMONS  
far more important, far more urgent than Uncle Sam’s...

for I am speaking to you, not on behalf of the United States Army,  
but in the name of the ALMIGHTY GOD!

Here is the message:

God says, “I WANT YOU!” – YES, you!

You there in the back row, sinking low to make yourself invisible.

Yes, you kids... you old folks too!

You timid souls that never volunteer...and you busy ones who  
like to excuse yourselves.

God wants YOU to be His soldiers. He wants to entrust to you a vital  
MESSAGE that will literally change the lives of those who receive it.

Don't think this is MY idea, for I too am only a messenger.

It is GOD'S IDEA, as St. Paul made clear long ago to the Corinthians:

**We are ambassadors for Christ, God making HIS appeal through US!**

God wants you for His MESSENGERS. So what's the message?

Simply this:

God has sent a Savior down here behind enemy lines.

His name is Jesus.

He died to forgive our sins, and He was  
raised to life again.

Everyone who puts his trust in Jesus  
will receive eternal life.

You know it, don't you? You believe it too, don't you?

But I preach this sermon to remind you of something both of us forget –  
that it is a LIFE OR DEATH MATTER!

Those who die without hearing it, without believing it,  
WILL BE LOST ETERNALLY...

just as surely as those poor people wandering in the rubble of Haiti  
will die without food and water.

Since that is true, it is a matter of GREAT URGENCY that we deliver this message!

Let me illustrate with a true and very sad story:

Many years ago lived a young woman named Miss Manning.

She had fallen in love with a young man who had gone to serve as a  
missionary to India.

One day, she received a letter from him, asking her to marry him.

"If you do not answer," he said in the letter, "I will take it as your refusal."

She wasted no time in writing her eager acceptance.

She sealed the envelope, and since it was a very rainy day, her brother  
offered to take it to the post office....

Time passed. But Miss Manning never heard from her lover... or even saw him  
again! The report reached her that he had later married someone else.

For 20 years thereafter, she remained single and lived in grief.

One day, as she went through an old trunk, sorting through clothing,  
she found her brother's coat...and in one pocket, her letter, now yellowed  
with age...

IT HAD NEVER BEEN DELIVERED!

God has taken a similar risk  
in giving us the task of delivering his MESSAGE OF LOVE IN CHRIST.

Have we delivered it?  
Or does it remain in our pockets?

Only you can answer that question.

To my shame, I must confess that sometimes, I have not. You too?  
And if we are honest enough to admit that,  
can we be bold enough to explore the reasons why?

The text from Jeremiah may help us with such a look in the mirror.

Jeremiah stood before God's enlistment poster.  
He saw the finger pointed at him.  
He heard God say, "I WANT YOU!"

But Jeremiah refused to enlist.

**Ah, Lord God, he said, I do not know how to speak,  
for I am only a youth!**

Haven't we said the same?

"Ah, Lord God, I am the WRONG AGE!  
I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks...too old to go pounding on doors!"

"Ah, Lord God, I'm too young.  
I haven't learned enough... and nobody would pay attention to me anyway!"

We say other things too...

"Ah, Lord, you know I have no TALENT. I stumble over my words.  
I'm too tall and gangly... too short and dumpy.  
Too scared – I'd freeze up and feel stupid.

Too sinful – how could I encourage anyone if I’ve failed so often?”

We finish our habitual excuses, and there comes a SILENCE.

And we see that God is still there, like the poster of Uncle Sam.

He already knows it all. He’s heard it all

Yet still His finger points at us.

Still He says, “I WANT YOU!”

You see, there is no one else to call.

If God were to eliminate those who are too OLD or too YOUNG  
or too OLD or too OVERWEIGHT  
or too UNTALENTED or too FEARFUL or too SINFUL...

there would be no one left at all!

Read the roster of GREAT PEOPLE IN THE Bible, and you will hear them make the same excuses we do...

Moses said he wasn’t a good speaker.

David was a runt.

Isaiah had a foul mouth.

Gideon apologized for his unimpressive family.

Sarah laughed because she was post-menopausal.

Jonah just didn’t want to go, so he ran away.

But God used them all...and He used Jeremiah too. In every case He brushed away the objections:

‘I AM GOD. I WILL EQUIP YOU!’

He reminded Jeremiah of the three P’s. Don’t know what those are?

Let me review them for you:

The first P is for PLAN.

**Before you were born, Jeremiah, I consecrated you to be a prophet**

The second P stands for PROVISION.

**Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.”**

No more excuses, Jeremiah!

The third P stands for PRESENCE.

**Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.**

Maybe you think that this is special treatment reserved for the bigwigs and VIPs in the Kingdom of God.

NOT SO!

God offers the same things to you and me through Jesus Christ today.

Let's re-visit the three P's and I'll explain.

He has PLANS for us!

Ephesians 1: **God chose us in him before the foundation of the world.**

God has plans – particular, detailed plans – for you, friend.

It may surprise you to hear me say this, but I believe God does NOT want you to take His message to EVERYONE. Rather, He has selected particular people that He puts in your path.

As He explained to Jeremiah, **You shall go to all to whom I send you**  
Not everyone, but rather “those to whom I send you”.

St. Paul was forbidden to go to Asia – instead, the Holy Spirit steered him to Macedonia.

God has PLANS for you that involve particular people at certain “opportune moments.”

Many of those moments will be unexpected...

One Sunday morning many years ago as I was teaching a youth Sunday School class, we heard a sudden crashing sound of metal and glass.

We raced to the window and saw that it was a traffic accident in the street not fifty feet from our classroom.

Police and ambulance arrived quickly, and the young woman in the car, bleeding badly, was pulled from the wreckage and taken to the hospital.

The next day, as I prayed for her, I felt a strong compulsion to visit her, and during that visit, there opened up a wonderful opportunity to make a brief witness to Jesus.

Weeks later, there came a card from her, thanking me for the visit and expressing her desire to return to church after a long absence...

An “accident,” did I call it?

Rather, I looked on it as some kind of divine appointment, part of His gracious PLAN for her and for me.

Has God put someone in your path? Laid some soul on your heart?

Watch! Listen!

The second P is for PROVISION.

Hasn't He begun to provide for you already?

In your baptism, He provided a “down payment” of the Holy Spirit.

Just now He is filling your ears with the sound of His Word – the Good News that He loves you, calls you, forgives you, empowers you in Christ.

Think back. There have been other things.

Even the strange, painful experiences you've been through. Were they not part of His provision – readying you to understand and sympathize with people who now face what you once faced?

Along the way in my own life, my experiences include  
a stint as a paper boy  
hours of memory work in confirmation class  
my younger brother's attempted suicide  
ridicule from co-workers in a warehouse  
a painful knee surgery  
the death of both of my parents  
and my collapse in this very pulpit during a funeral...

all of which God has used in some way to provide for me, and for my witness.

Think back over your life. Include even the heartaches and failures.

God was in all of that, shaping you, providing for you.

But you still feel inadequate?

Then remember the third P – His PRESENCE.

**I am with you always**, He said.

Look at the cross up here. It is EMPTY!  
For He is no Dead Savior, but a living Lord.

He will not send you out alone, and He promises to whisper into your ear  
when you run out of words and courage.

**Do not be anxious about what you are to say, for it will be  
given you in that very hour...**

Like the steady hand of the physical therapist who walks behind the patient  
and keeps him from falling, He promises to walk with you.

Now you are ready to hear it once more. As I began this sermon, so I will end it.

GOD WANTS YOU to speak his message!  
Without it people are dying.

Years ago back East there was a terrible train wreck.

A doctor traveling on board had escaped injury, but he stood helpless  
amidst the wreckage and watched a fellow passenger dying.

Turning to a bystander, the doctor cried out,  
“My God, if only I had my instruments!”

God’s INSTRUMENTS. That’s what WE are to be!  
By the mercy of Christ, that’s what we ALREADY ARE!

The need is urgent.  
The call has gone out.... I WANT YOU!