

CHAPTER IV

"HERE AM I"

"Thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am."—
Isa. lviii. 9.

THE Bible is the revelation of God to man. It is also the record of man's response to that revelation. Human life finds its full realisation in the knowledge of and obedience to God's will. When man learns the will of God and fashions his life thereby, he has learnt the deepest secret of the universe and found the truest satisfaction.

How may this be accomplished? How may man start on the pathway of the will of God? In the three words which head this chapter, when they are rightly understood, we have the whole Bible in miniature. They offer what may be called a formula, which, when properly used, will reveal to mankind the secret of living, and it is hardly too much to say that everything else from Genesis to Revelation concerning God and man is simply the amplification of these three words.

They are found several times in Scripture, translated "Here I am," or "Here am I," and when the references are collected and classified, they illustrate the threefold attitude of man to the will of

God. In one instance the words are spoken by God to man, in others they are spoken by man to God, while in several more they are spoken by man to man. We can therefore see in them the threefold aspect of human life as lived from God, to God and for God.

As we consider the Christian life and try to realise something of its responsibilities and possibilities, it will be well for us to ponder afresh the secret of true living, the way to meet not only the extraordinary, but, what is far more difficult, the ordinary demands of daily life. It is comparatively easy to shine on great occasions and to meet special emergencies. It is not so easy to shine in ordinary duties and to meet the momentary requirements of everyday living. We need, it is true, our great experiences, "to mount up with wings as eagles." Nor must we be without power for times of exceptional pressure, "to run and not be weary." But far above all we need grace for the little things of life, "the daily round, the common task," to "walk, and not faint" (Isa. xl. 31).

In many ways life is difficult and its problems complex, making heavy demands on heart, brain and body. But the difficulty and complexity can all be met by the simplicity and sufficiency of God's glorious provision in Christ as we see it revealed to us in the Scriptures of truth.

The simplicity and sufficiency are well illustrated in the short phrase now before us, and if we can only enter into its full meaning and application we shall find it the secret of all true life—a simple basal principle that touches and covers everything. “Here am I.” God says it to man. Man says it to God. Man says it to man. It means, first of all,

LIFE FROM GOD

In Isaiah lviii. 9. the phrase occurs with God as the speaker. “Thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am.” This is the answer of God to human need in the assurance of His presence. “Here I am.” The gospel of the presence of God is the very core of the revelation of Christ.

“Here I am.” He is here for *Pardon*. “His presence is salvation” (Psalm xlii. 5, marg.) This was so in the historical revelation of God in Christ. He did not *send*; He came. A Chinese catechist once depicted the sinner as fallen into a deep and dangerous pit, and helpless and hopeless. First came Confucius, and, looking down, said: “I am very sorry for you. If you get out of that, take care you do not fall in again.” Next came Buddha, who, looking down in pity, said: “If only you could get up half *way*, I could come to meet

you half way, and so raise you up." Last of all, Jesus came by, and went down to the very depth of that pit, lifted up the poor, wounded sinner, "set his feet on a rock, and established his goings."

When Christ came to Bethlehem and Calvary it was God saying and showing in blessed reality, "Here am I."

It is the unique and crowning glory of Christianity that it saves mankind by the presence of God in the world. In no other religion or religious system is the presence of God a reality in human life. In Mohammedanism He is exalted far above man and entirely separated from human sins and needs. In Buddhism he is lost in the world of nature and has no personal contact with human hearts. In Mohammedanism God is lost to man by reason of His transcendence, and in Buddhism by reason of His supposed immanence. The same results accrue from the Unitarian conception of God, and are also manifest in the various philosophical systems which occupy much of human thought today. God is either regarded as dwelling in solitary abstraction and out of all touch with human life, or else He is absorbed in the created world, and in no sense a power over individual hearts.

Only in Christianity are the two great complementary truths of God's transcendence and immanence preserved, reconciled and balanced. God

is assuredly transcendent in all the glory of His unique splendour and divine majesty, but He is also immanent, divinely and blessedly present, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Christian revelation of the Holy Trinity alone preserves God to us as a personal presence and a practical power. "Here I am" is the simple yet adequate expression of the revelation of God in Christ. "I am," teaches us the transcendence. "*Here I am,*" reveals the immanence. The first chapter of the Old Testament brings us the former: "In the beginning God created." The first chapter of the New Testament reveals to us the latter: "Emmanuel, God with us."

This historical revelation of the presence of God is realised and crowned in the individual application of it to every man. "Here am I" is true not only historically but of each one personally. It is the approach of God to the soul that brings salvation. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." It is none other than God Himself who pleads, and seeks to lead the soul to Himself. "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." The Holy Spirit is present now, striving with every soul, and to each one He says, "Here am I."

"And His that gentle voice we hear
Soft as the breath of even."

To every sinner comes the message, "The Word is nigh thee." Man has not to strive and climb in order to reach up to God and find Him. God is here, waiting to be gracious, not willing that any should lose or miss Him. And it is the entrance of God into the soul that really constitutes salvation. He does not send a gift: He comes Himself. Salvation is not so much a gift as the presence of the Divine Giver. "Here am I."

"Here I am." He is here for *Power*. Forgiveness is the first but not the only need of man. He requires grace for the present as well as pardon for the past. The sin of the past needs forgiveness, but the sinful nature of the present needs grace, and for this God says "Here I am." For every need of life, actual and possible, for every conceivable circumstance, God says, "Here I am." "Fear thou not; for I am with thee" (Isa. xli. 10). To every believer, however difficult his pathway, God says, "My grace IS sufficient for thee," and in this blessed present fact is perfect provision for "all things that pertain to life and godliness." It was so with the three men in the fire in Babylon: there was One with them Who said, "Here I am."

"Here I am." He is here for *Guidance*. The way of life is not always straight, and the believer needs guidance and wisdom as much as the Israelite of old. What Israel had in symbol, we now

have in reality, for the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire are still with us in the presence of God in Christ. Christ is "made unto us wisdom" and the Spirit is "the Spirit of Truth." "I am the light . . . he that followeth Me shall . . . have the Light."

"Here I am." This also means *Courage*. "I will be with thee" was the word of cheer to Joshua. "The Lord is with thee" was the inspiration to Gideon. "The Lord stood with me" was the comfort of St. Paul. So has it been throughout the ages. "Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs," yea, and the unknown millions of ordinary believers in all centuries have known the blessedness of "Here am I" spoken by God to their hearts, and have found in the presence of God courage, strength, joy and blessing.

"Here I am" is the assurance of *Peace*. "In Me ye might have peace." The "peace of God" is God's own presence as the "God of peace." Peace in every sense of the word is guaranteed to us not so much as a gift but rather as a Presence, the presence of "the Lord of Peace Himself."

"Here I am" is the inspiration of *Hope*. "Christ in you the hope." As we look forward to the future, the guarantee of all our expectation is the presence of Christ in our hearts now. We shall be with Him then because He is with us now. We shall be like Him then because He is in us now.

All our future glories are based on present grace, and of that grace the presence of God is the only source and perennial fountain.

Truly then as we realise what "Here I am" means as a word from God to us, "His presence is salvation," in every aspect of that great word. Salvation from past guilt, salvation through present grace, salvation in future glory. Glory to God for His presence now and ever.

And God *says* "Here I am" to everyone who needs and seeks Him. He says it by His Word and His Spirit. The Bible from end to end is full of the definite personal revelations of God to His servants, "Here I am." And as He is the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever," that faithful word is ours to-day, which assures us of His perpetual presence in, and with, and for, His people. As well may we doubt our own existence as doubt the fact and assurance of His presence. To us as to the disciples God says in the plainest language: "Lo! I am with you all the days."

"This ray of promise falls on darkened ways,
'Lo, I am with you alway—all the days;
The bright, untroubled, gladsome days of life,
The days of bitterness and care and strife.

The days when peace doth like a river flow,
The days of grief with weary hours and slow;
He goes not on far journeys. Christ is near,
He leaves no day without its help and cheer.

As once of old, 'He knew what He would do.'
When servants were dismayed and troubled too;
So now, with infinite supplies at hand,
He walks with us, though in a barren land.

Some sweet surprise He doubtless has in store,
Some secret that He never told before.
For this, perhaps, He leads through shaded ways,
And you will understand ere many days."

Now follows naturally another meaning of these three words in view of their use by man in relation to God,

LIFE TO GOD

We find them first of all as the words of Abraham spoken to God (Gen. xxii. 1), and they are used elsewhere on several occasions in the same connection. They indicate the keynote of all true life, a life lived to God. They denote the response of the soul to God's revelation of Himself. God says "Here I am" to man, and then man welcomes this and responds with "Here am I" to God.

The words imply *Surrender*. When the believer says "Here am I" to God, he places himself at God's disposal. This whole-hearted response is the natural outcome of the reception of God's revelation to the soul. We can see this truth on every page of the New Testament. God comes

to the soul, enters the heart and life, and then man yields himself entirely to God as belonging to Him. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought." This is the meaning of St. Paul's great word translated "yield" in Rom. vi. 13, 19, and "present" in ch. xii. 1. In the latter passage the Apostle bases his exhortation on the "mercies of God," on the revelation of God saying "Here I am" to man, and after urging his readers to "present" their bodies as a sacrifice to God he speaks of this surrender as their "logical service," the rational, logical, necessary outcome of their acceptance of "the mercies of God." The Gospel does not come to the soul simply for personal enjoyment, it comes to awaken in it a sense of its true life and marvellous possibilities. Consequently, when God says to the believer, "I am thine," the believer responds, "I am Thine" (Psalm cxix. 94), "I am the Lord's" (Isa. xlv. 5). This was one part of the purpose of our Lord's redemption work, "that He might be Lord" and now, "we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 8 and 9). This whole-hearted response should be made from the first moment of acceptance in and of Christ. "Christ is all" to us from the outset; and we should be "all to Him." There should be no *hiatus*, no gap, no interval, between the acceptance of Christ as Saviour and the surrender to Him as Lord. His full title is "Jesus Christ our Lord"; and the full extent of its meaning (though

of course not its full depth) is intended to be realised from our very first experience of His saving presence and power. And if we have never realised this, and if we have been, at least in measure, enjoying His grace without yielding to Him His full rights, now is the time to bow before Him, and with a definite act of loving trust and surrender to say, "Lord Jesus, here am I."

This initial act of surrender, however, is but the beginning of a life of surrender. The act must develop into an attitude. This has been recognised by God's true children in all ages as their "bounden duty and service."

It was evidently the attitude of Abraham when God proved him. From the day in which he responded, however imperfectly, to God's call in Chaldea, he was learning new lessons, sometimes painful but always blessed, and was discovering more and more of the glories of His covenant God (Gen. xxi. 33). Then when the new and supreme test came he was able to respond, in prompt and full surrender, "Here am I."

Jacob realised the same claim of God, and made the same whole-hearted response when he heard the voice of God in Syria, and said, "Here am I" (Gen. xxxi. 11). And yet again, on his return from Canaan, when fresh lessons were to be learnt, he answered, "Here am I" (Gen. xlv. 2). It is the secret of all peace in the Christian life as it is

also the source of all power. It places the soul in the right attitude before God and it keeps it there. Shall we not therefore fulfil this blessed condition as we read these lines? Shall we not "offer and present our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice" to God? Surely we must, we will this instant definitely, deliberately and determinedly yield ourselves to our God and say, "Here am I."

"Here I am," spoken to God, involves *Service*. Our surrender naturally leads to service for God. His possession of us means His use of us. We see this in the life of Moses when he responded "Here am I" to the call of God (Ex. iii. 4), for the surrender was followed by life-long work. Isaiah exemplifies the same experience, for his "Here am I" is at once followed by "send me" (Isa. vi. 8). God has a work for each of His children. We are not only sons but servants. In that earliest church whose life is recorded in the book of Acts there was no distinction between "Christians" and "church workers," for every Christian was necessarily a worker. A well-known handbook now used for tabulating church work has a large section headed "Communicants who are not Workers." What a sad commentary on unfaithfulness among "those who profess and call themselves Christians"! Every believer is in-

tended to be a worker and to respond by lip and life, "Here am I."

This response clearly demands readiness in the two senses of that word. It means willingness and preparedness. "Here am I" is the utterance of the man who has received Christ Jesus as Lord, and who longs to show by every possible means the reality and blessedness of that experience. It is the heartfelt response of the willing servant who directly the call comes says with Joshua, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" (Josh. v. 14). It is the deep and increasing conviction of the heart and conscience that "I am Thine" means and includes "I am Thy servant." Like St. Paul of old, the believer not only says, "I am debtor," but also following it, "I am ready" (Rom. i. 14, 15).

This willingness to serve naturally leads to preparedness for work. "Here am I" suggests fitness, that is, a condition of soul which makes it "meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. ii. 21). And the very surrender already referred to is the secret of this fitness; for by it the soul is in such an attitude before God that He can endue it with all needed grace and power, and render it "prepared unto every good work." Both ideas of readiness therefore enter into this response of the soul as it surrenders to God and waits on Him for service, saying, "Here am I."

This is the sevenfold readiness depicted in the New Testament:

Ready to preach (Rom. i. 15).

Ready to give an answer (1 Pet. iii. 15).

Ready to distribute (1 Tim. vi. 18).

Ready to every good work (Titus iii. 1).

Ready to be offered (2 Tim. iv. 6).

Ready to die (Acts xxi. 13).

Ready for the coming (Matt. xxiv. 44, and xxvi. 10).

And it is all summed up in—

Readiness of mind (Acts xvii. 11).

Readiness of will (2 Cor. viii. 11).

This response will assuredly issue in *Satisfaction*. "Here am I" not only deals with facts, the facts of God's possession of us and of our acceptance of His will, but also involves and implies the conscious realisation of the facts in all their deep joy and peace. The soul not only says, "I am Thine," but knows by experience the rest and strength of it. David knew what this meant when he said, "Behold, here am I; let Him do to me as seemeth good to Him" (2 Sam. xv. 26).

This satisfaction is due to the consciousness not only of God's will accepted, but also of God's will done. In proportion to our obedience will be our inward satisfaction. There is no joy comparable

with that which results from the consciousness of God's possession of us, and of our loyalty to Him. When we from the heart say, "Here am I," we begin to know the joy and strength and bliss of true service for Him "whose service is" perfect freedom"; indeed we find the truth and the joy of the terse phrase of the old Latin collect: "Whom to serve is to reign."

Shall not this surrender, this service, this satisfaction be a reality all our days? Let us think of the work waiting to be done, "new stations to be filled and blanks supplied" at home and abroad. Let us try to realise the millions who have not so much as heard whether there be a Saviour, and then with all our hearts respond, "Here am I, send me." Shall we not *now* say it? "Here am I." And if we have already done so, shall we not joyfully renew our consecration? Shall we not literally *say* it to God this moment? And then we will keep continually saying it as day after day comes with all the sweet surprises and glorious possibilities of fellowship and service.

I am the Lord's! O joy beyond expression,
O sweet response to voice of love divine;
Faith's joyous "Yes" to the assuring whisper,
"Fear not: I have redeemed thee; thou art Mine."
This the transforming word which faith receiveth,
The message which the child-like soul believeth.

I am the Lord's! It hushes every murmur,
It soothes the fevered spirit to its rest;
I am the Lord's! It is the child's rejoinder,
Who knows and feels the Father's will is best;
The first glad cry of soul emancipation,
The highest note of praise and exultation.

I am the Lord's! Yet teach me all it meaneth,
All it involves of love and loyalty,
Of holy service, absolute surrender,
And unreserved obedience unto Thee.
They nearest draw to joy's sublime perfection,
Who seek it in the depths of full subjection.

Our phrase "Here am I" culminates in a third meaning when it is spoken by man to man, for it means

LIFE FOR GOD

We find "Here am I" used by man in speaking to his fellows, and in this sense the words are the natural and necessary outcome of the two former uses of it. When we receive from God and respond to God, we naturally express our life in service for man for God's sake. "Here am I."

The words indicate our *Loyalty*. Esau said them to Isaac (Gen. xxvii. 1), and Isaac to Jacob (verse 18) in the spirit of true loyalty one to another. The child Samuel said "Here am I" to the aged Eli (1 Sam. iii. 8) as expressive of his genuine

readiness to be at the beck and call of his master. They seem to spring instinctively to the lips of true men when others call. They reveal the attitude of those who have learnt the secret of the only real "service of humanity," the service of man for the sake of Christ. Loyalty to Christ brings with it loyalty to man for whom Christ died; and wherever there is a human being needing help, there the true Christian heart will run, with its glad "Here am I." We need more and more of this readiness to be at the service of our fellows, for it is by our service for our brother that we best prove our loyalty to our Lord.

The words also express our *Love*. When Abraham said "Here am I" to his son Isaac (Gen. xxii. 7), he spoke in tender love, and, as it were, put himself at his son's disposal. His readiness was based on love, as all true service must be. Our loyalty to others finds its only adequate basis in love—love to God, love to the brotherhood, love to humanity. We can only say "Here am I" to our fellows when, and so far as, the love of God is pulsating through our being and impelling us to service. No man can truly serve his brother whom he sees unless he first love God whom he does not see. It is the constraint of love, deep, strong, constant, that impels, yea, compels a man to say to all around him, "Here am I."

And of course all this will involve *Labour*. Loy-

alty and love are not mere emotions, but mastering energies. They are not simple feelings, but solid facts. They are not summed up in dreamy sentiments, but in definite sacrifices. In the Bible loyalty and love are always expressed in acts and facts, not in mere aspirations and fancies. "God so loved the world that He *gave*." Christ loved the Church, . . . and *gave*." "Who loved me, and *gave*." So must it be with us. Love is proved by labour, by service, by the expenditure of thought, prayer, effort, yea, of our very selves. This is the true attitude of the believer as he stands witnessing for God to others. The whole of his life is just speaking to all around: "Let me serve you in any possible way." "Here am I."

Have we ever literally said this to any of our fellowmen? Have we ever expressed our wishfulness and willingness to be of use to them? Still better, have we ever shown it in our life by our readiness to serve them? This is the supreme test of reality, our willingness to live for others and thereby alone truly to live for God. The world will not be much impressed merely by our knowledge, clear and full though it may be. It will only be influenced when our knowledge is incarnated and realised in action. Nothing short of self-sacrificing service will suffice. This and this alone will impress and attract men, the attitude of the Christian to whom God is so real, and Christ

so precious, and the Spirit so powerful, that he cannot but say to his fellows, "Here am I."

If I can live

To make some pale face brighter, and to give
A second lustre to some tear-dimmed eye,

Or e'en impart

One throb of comfort to an aching heart,
Or cheer some wayworn soul in passing by;

If I can lend

A strong hand to the fallen, or defend
The right hand 'gainst a single envious strain,

My life, though bare

Perhaps of much that seemeth dear and fair,
To us on earth, will not have been in vain.

The purest joy,

Most near to heaven, far from earth's alloy,
Is bidding clouds give way to sun and shine:

And 'twill be well

If on that day of days the angels tell
Of me: "She did her best for one of Thine."

Is it not therefore correct to say that in this short phrase of three words we have the whole Bible in miniature? Life received from God; Life yielded to God; Life lived for God. What more can we have? Time and eternity are summed up therein.

It remains to notice still more closely the intimate and necessary connection between these three uses of the one phrase, "Here am I." The first

is the foundation of the other two. It is only as God reveals Himself that we can respond to Him or receive grace to serve our fellowmen. The brotherhood of man presupposes and demands as its necessary basis the Fatherhood of God. The only adequate motive power for true service between man and man is the revelation of God's grace in Christ. Altruism is only really possible and actually powerful in the light of Calvary.

The second use of "Here am I" is the pivot of the other two. It is only as we answer God's revelation that the revelation becomes effectual in our experience, or energetic in our service. The grace of God has been so conditioned that it requires human reception and response before it can become effective. It is sufficient for all the human race; but it only becomes efficient in those who welcome it to heart and life.

The third use of "Here am I" is the crown of the other two. All God's grace is for practical use, and not for mere speculation or simple enjoyment. Service is at once our duty and our glory; and the revelation of God's presence is only truly seen when the lives of His people are full of loving labour for the needy and sinful of this world.

Let us then realise fully our position of blessedness and blessing. Every moment God says, "Here am I" in His nearness to save, and keep, and bless. Every moment we should reply "Here am I," in

our readiness, our willingness, our wishfulness, our determination to surrender and to serve. Every moment we should show by our life, and whenever we can, say with our lips, "Here am I" in our attitude of loving alacrity to serve our fellows.

This is true Christianity; this is full Christianity; this is powerful Christianity; this is Christ-like Christianity; this is the Christianity that blesses and transforms man, wins for Christ the souls for whom He died, and abides to all eternity to the glory and praise of God.

"To me to live is Christ"—and yet the days
Are days of toiling men:
We rise at morn, and tread the beaten ways,
And lay us down again.

How is it that this base, unsightly life,
Can yet be Christ alone?
Our common need, and weariness, and strife,
While common days wear on?

Then saw I how before a Master wise,
A shapeless stone was set;
He said, "Therein a form of beauty lies,
Though none behold it yet.

When all beside it shall be hewn away,
That glorious shape shall stand,
In beauty of the everlasting day,
Of the unsullied land."