

Here I Am, Lord

The Rev. Dr.
E. Stanley Ott

Acts 9:10-25

Sermon Series:
God's Big Story

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person.*

We have been studying God's Big Story for several months now. A story captured, as Pastor Pete likes to say, by three key words: creation, fall, redemption. We see the marvelous work of creation, the tragedy of the fall in which humankind goes its own way apart from God and suffers the consequences, and the wonder of redemption as God forgives us and wins us back to Himself through the death and resurrection of His son, Jesus.

Before we come to our text in the book of Acts today, I want to lift up a few scenes from God's Big Story. See if you can hear the common element in all of them. In Genesis, the first book in the Bible, we discover Abraham minding his own business one day when God said, "Abraham!" And Abraham replied, "Here I am" (Genesis 22:1). Now, the Hebrew word translated, "Here I am" is one of the few Hebrew words I still remember... *Hinnainee*. Here I am is the attitude of the servant, the send-able person. Here I am... available... reporting for duty... your word is my command... at your service... how may I serve you today? *Hinnainee*— Here I am. The movie *The Princess Bride* was on television this week. The young woman Buttercup has a servant by the name of Wesley—and every

time she asks him to do something, he replies, "As you wish." Later, when they are reunited after a long separation, she doesn't recognize him until he says, "As you wish." That's *hinnainee*—as you wish—your word is my command—how may I serve you today?

So God says, "Abraham." He replies, "*Hinnainee*... here I am," and God sends him on a mission. Years later, Abraham's grandson Jacob, as a young man, reports, "The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, [*hinnainee*] Here I am" (Genesis 31:11). When he is an old man, Jacob again hears the Lord's voice. And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" [*hinnainee*] "Here I am," he replied (Genesis 46:2). *Hinnainee* is the attitude of the heart that is willing to hear the Lord and to be sent.

Time passes in God's Big Story. Moses is tending the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. Suddenly, he sees something remarkable. A bush on fire with a fire that does not go out. Moses walks over to check it out. When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "[*hinnainee*] Here I am" (Exodus 3:4).

More time passes in God's Big Story until there is a time when the priests of the Hebrews are no longer

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faithful to the Lord and God raises up the prophet Samuel. When Samuel was just a small boy, The LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, “*Hinnainee*..Here I am” (I Samuel 3:4). He thinks Eli the old man has called him. He runs to Eli. *Hinnainee*, you called me? No, I didn't, go back to bed. A second time, the Lord said, “Samuel,” and Samuel runs again to Eli, “*Hinnainee*. Here I am, you called?” No, I didn't...go back to bed. This happens a third time and as Samuel says *Hinnainee* a third time, Eli realizes it's the Lord and tells Samuel the next time to say, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”... What is the *hinnainee*—here I am” attitude? “Here I am...available...reporting for duty... your word is my command...speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

So Abraham, Moses and Samuel all replied to God's call with *hinnainee*, here I am Lord, and more years go by in God's Big Story until we see Isaiah is minding his own business when God gives him a fantastic vision of the Lord sitting on his great throne high and exalted, his robe filling the whole temple. And Isaiah says, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And Isaiah said, “*Hinnainee* - Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). In the last example of this in God's Big story that I will mention, we jump to Luke 1 and see the young woman Mary, to whom the angel Gabriel said, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor

with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus” (Luke 1:30-31). Mary and Gabriel talk for a few moments and then Mary says, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). *Hennainee*. Here I am—Lord!

Do you begin to see a pattern? God called Abraham, God called Jacob, God called Moses, God called Isaiah, God called Mary and every one of them responded the same way. *Hinnainee*—here I am Lord! What is it you want me to do? God calls and God's people reply with deference, humility and a servant heart. *Hinnainee*—Here I am, Lord. Now, I would like you to be able to remember this word, so I would like to ask you to repeat out loud three times—*hinnainee* (hinnay-knee). When God calls you—calls you directly—speaks to you through His Word, the Bible, calls you to serve through someone at home or at work or in the church or at play, when God calls, our response is simply, “*Hinnainee!*” How may I serve you today?

As we pick up God's Big Story as reported in the book of Acts, we saw how Saul approved of the stoning of Stephen and that he did not believe in the risen Jesus until on his way to the city of Damascus. He encountered Jesus who said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” The blinding light of that encounter left Saul blind, and so his companions get Saul back on his horse and continue their journey to Damascus. Acts, chapter 9, picks up the story. “¹⁰Now there was a

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disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered [can you guess what Ananias answered? *Hinnainee!*] "Here I am, Lord." We don't know much about Ananias. He is only described as a disciple—a follower of Jesus. Later, Paul the Apostle portrays him as a devout man who was well-spoken of. What we see immediately is that Ananias stands in the stream of God's people, who throughout the history of God's Big Story have heard the call of God and responded with *hinnainee*, here I am, Lord!

"¹¹The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight [which was and still is the main street of Damascus], and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.'" Now Ananias was all *hinnainee*, all "here I am Lord," until God mentioned Saul's name. Suddenly, Ananias sounds a little less ready to serve. He actually begins to give God information. "You know, Lord, perhaps you are not aware of this ¹³Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." So what God is asking of Ananias sounds difficult, sounds like a hassle, sounds inconvenient, even dangerous and suddenly, instead of saying *hinnainee*,

Ananias is feeling more like *hinnai-no!*

At times you will have the opportunity to serve—perhaps serve a member of your family, perhaps to undertake a task at work or in some other aspect of your life, and it's just not what you want to do—it's a hassle or you aren't in the mood or whatever. Will you empty the dishwasher? Take out the trash? Review our insurances? Or some task at work or in life that you just don't particularly want to do. Howard Hendricks tells of a family with a small boy, who decided to go out to eat. While enjoying their meal in the restaurant, suddenly the little boy decided to stand up in his chair. His father said, "Sit down." The boy said, "No!" The dad said, "Sit down!" The boy said, "NO!" The father said, "SON, SIT DOWN!" The boy sat down. Then looking his father in the eye says, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside!" I have to admire the boy's spunk and spirit while at the same time realizing that his attitude was the exact opposite of *hinnainee*—here I am. It was more of a *hinnai-no*—a here I am not—than a *hinnainee!*

Moses had a *hinnai-no* moment. God spoke to him out of the burning bush and Moses had said, *Hinnainee*, here I am, Lord. And God tells Moses that he is to rescue God's people, Israel. Moses is overwhelmed. But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."..."O my

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Lord, please send someone else” (Exodus 4:10-13). Hinnai-no! Not me, Lord! Send someone else! Moses does eventually go, but you and I know very well what it is to be asked to do something or we see something that ought to be done that we just plain do not want to do—because it’s a hassle or inconvenient or costly or whatever! We want to say hinnai-no when we are being called to *hinnainee*—here I am—how may I graciously serve you?

So Ananias appears to be feeling like saying hinnai-no when thinking about going to visit Saul, “¹⁵But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he [Saul] is an instrument whom I have chosen ...’¹⁷So Ananias went [and in the spirit of *hinnaini*, he stepped out in faith and entered the house]. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.”

So who offers us the ultimate illustration of the *hinnainee*—here I am—attitude? It is Jesus, who said the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. As he said in the garden of Gethsemane facing great suffering, where it would have been so easy to say hinain-NO but instead he wonderfully says to God his Father, “Not my will but yours be done”—I am

willing to do your bidding—*hinnainee*! Jesus Christ was utterly available to his Father even when his Father sent him on an exceedingly tough assignment. Our Lord sends you to serve him in everyday life and in particular assignments that he gives to you. In everyday life, *hinnainee* is the daily word of availability—Here I am Lord, as a parent, a teacher, a policeman, a doctor, a husband, a wife, a son, a daughter, a whatever. How can I serve you and the people you put in my life to the maximum this day?

It’s easy to talk about serving—but in order to serve we have to become aware of the opportunity to serve. For example, take the ESS—End of Summer Service—Sunday, September 6th, when we will worship together at 10 a.m.—be sent to serve in practical ways in the community and return for a celebration here at VPC. It would be easy to hear about the opportunity to serve but to find a way to say hinnai-no, because we live in a day where we let our own busyness get in the way of serving. Judge Woodrow Seal, a U.S. District court judge, founded what is known as "The Society of St. Stephen" in the Methodist Church. It has become a national program, with the sole purpose of helping people in need. One day, a church invited Judge Seal to come to their congregation to explain to them how they could begin a Society of St. Stephen in their church. So the judge came. The plan was for him to speak on the various ministries the Society engaged in, and then there would be some time for discussion.

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While the people took their seats, the pastor began to introduce Judge Seal and the work of the Society. The judge took some cookies and poured himself some coffee. Then the introduction was completed, Judge Seal walked over to the piano, put his coffee cup on top of it, and began to fumble in his coat pockets. Finally, he pulled out a wrinkled piece of paper and from it he read the name of a mother and her four children, including their ages and their clothing sizes.

He noted several other needs this particular family had, and said the address was on the paper, and he laid it on top of the piano. The judge then said, "If you want to start a Society of St. Stephen, then you should contact this woman by 11:30 tomorrow morning. If you are not able to help her, don't worry, I'll be in contact with her tomorrow, and get her help by mid-afternoon." With that, Judge Seal remarked, "Now, forgive me, but I really must be going. Thank you for inviting me and for the coffee and the cookies." Then he walked out the door. It all took less than five minutes.¹ The people who came thought they'd hear a nice talk, eat some cookies and go home. The judge put an opportunity to serve in front of them and they had a decision to make. *Hinnainee* or hinnai-no! If someone in your home or your place of employment or your church or some situation places a request, a call, an invitation before you to do something, you have the same choice.

¹ Adapted from Word and Witness, Sept. 24, 1989 Vol. 14, No. 1(4) quoted in Dynamic Preaching, p. 23-24.

A rather wonderful Christian singer and musician is a man by the name of Ken Medema. There are two remarkable things about Ken. First, he is blind and is a brilliant pianist. Second, he makes up his music, both melodies and lyrics, right on the spot as he sings to you. God has given him a very amazing gift. Well, twenty years ago, some of us invited Ken to come and do a concert for our church in Indiana. The sanctuary was packed thirty minutes before the concert was to begin. Ken had a huge following and he knew it. A dozen of us responsible for the concert gathered with him and sat in chairs around a large conference table to spend some time in prayer before the concert began. Our eyes were closed, of course, and various people were taking turns praying for Ken and for the people in attendance when all of a sudden I heard this loud thump.

There was Ken Medema, one of the most gifted musicians of our day, to whom comes constant appreciation, adoration, affirmation, a man who overcomes a significant handicap everyday of his life, on the floor, head bowed, knees bent in the most humble posture imaginable. I remember his prayer: "Lord, all I have, all I am, all I am capable of doing is from you. I am the product of your godly imagination. Lord work through me, sing through me, lead others to see you and trust you and follow you, through me." I realized this man's humility was real. There is humility in *hinnainee*! He is the expression of *hinnainee*— here I am, Lord. His strength, his gifts, even his weaknesses placed in

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the direct service of Jesus Christ. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, “I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that did not call on my name” (Isaiah 65:1). Wow! The Lord is saying to you, *Hinnainee*—Here I am! If you call on me I will answer. I am with you. I am for you. I am here for you. Let not your heart be troubled. The Lord who calls us to serve serves us.