

**ATHE VISION SPLENDID@**

Evangelist Johnnie Lavender

Job 35:10

**A**Where is God my maker that giveth songs in the night?@ Someone has called these words from Job 35:10 the heart-cry of the centuries. From the beginning of time, and from the hearts and lips of people of every color, every continent, every condition and every circumstance of sin has come this plaintive cry, **A**Where is God my maker that giveth songs in the night?@

In one way or another it has been voiced by men bent low with the weight of their years. By young people in the prime of their youth. By mothers with babies at their breasts and by little children. In fact, many of us have been stumped at one time or another by this question coming from the heart and lips of a little child, **A**Mommy, daddy, where does God live?@

Several years ago, when my niece Marilyn was quite small, she came to her mother and said, **A**Mommy, where does God live?@ My sister Doris, thought for a moment and answered wisely, **A**Well, dear, if we love him, God lives in our hearts.@ Marilyn said, **A**I love God, mommy. Does that mean that God lives inside of me?@ Her mother answered, **A**Yes, dear, that's right.@

The little girl seemed satisfied and went back to her playing. Several days later she was eating her lunch, which consisted of applesauce among other things. Suddenly she stopped and, with a frown on her face asked, **A**Mommy! Is God mad at me?@ Her mother replied, **A**Why would God be mad at you, Marilyn?@ **A**If was God, I'd be mad!@ **A**I don't understand honey, what do you mean?@ Marilyn answered, **A**If I had applesauce over me, I'd be mad! You said God lives inside of me, and with me eating this stuff he must have it all over him by now.@

Yes, even from the hearts of little children has come the cry, **A**Where is God, my maker that giveth songs in the night?@

The purpose of my message this morning is to help you find the answer. To help you not only *find* him, but *connect* with him in such a way that you *know* him in a warm and personal way.

The key to that kind of knowing is faith. Faith in the sinless Son of God. Faith in the efficacy of his blood shed upon the cross. Faith in the power of his resurrection.

Oh, I know there are those who scoff at the idea of faith as a means of knowing *anything*, let alone *God*. They call it illogical and unscientific. But the truth is, we *all* live by faith in one form or another.

Every time you get into your car and proceed down the street -- there is an exercise in faith. Faith in the tires that they will withstand the rugged torture of the road. Faith in the brakes that they will stop you in the eventuality of a crisis. Faith in the power of the engine to get you from where you are, to where you want to be.

Every time you write a check and cash it at the bank -- there is a transaction of faith. At least on the banker's part, if your checking account looks anything like mine! Actually, were it not for faith in one another and certain economic principles, our entire free-enterprise system would crumble over night.

Every time you walk into a darkened room, flick a switch on the wall and light comes into the room -- there is an exercise in faith. Faith in electricity which, in and of itself is something of a mystery. To be sure, there are people who can tell us about electricity. They can describe its attributes. They can share their observations of how it works. But no one knows all there is to know about electricity, yet we still exercise faith in it.

The same can be said of your questions about God. I don't know all there is to know about God. I can't answer all your questions about God. I can tell you a little bit *about* him. I can describe some of his *attributes*. I can share my personal observations of how he *works*. And, I can assure you that if, *by faith*, you receive his Son as your Savior and thereby get connected up with him,

God will cause light to come into your life. But nobody knows all there is to know about God.

Perhaps you are thinking, AWait a minute, preacher. I know a bit about science and that's an inept analogy. Maybe we don't know all there is to know about electricity, but we know there is such a thing as electricity because we can see it. We can hear it. We can feel it. Therefore, we know it exists. But no one has ever seen God. No one has ever heard God. No one has ever felt God. Be honest with me, preacher. Have you ever seen God?@

### Seeing God

And I will answer back in all sincerity, AYes, I have seen God.@

I saw God last Christmas season as I stood before a huge choir and heard them sing that great musical tribute by Handel, AThe Messiah.@ When they sang the Hallelujah Chorus, the room was filled with the beating of angels wings, as if the hosts of heaven had pushed back the gates of Glory and I could see God in all of his majesty and might. When they sang, AWonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords@ it seemed as if all the clouds of doubt were pushed aside by the hand of God himself, and I could gaze upon the face of Jesus in all his beauty.

Yes, I have seen God. I have seen God in the lives of people. I have seen God take human derelicts -- who had been broken and battered and scarred by sin, people whom *other* people had cast aside on the scrapheap of life as worthless -- and I have seen God lift them out of the miry clay, place their feet on the solid rock of new life in Jesus, give them new goals to reach and new power with which to reach them. Yes, I have seen God in the lives of people.

I have seen God in my mother. When, as a little boy, she would take me to her knee, comb my hair, wash my face and, when I needed it which was fairly often, lay me across her lap and paddle the seat of my pants. I have seen God in my mother when she would hold me on her lap and tell me the story of Jesus. She would explain how Jesus came to earth from heaven, how he faced all

kinds of temptations and trials without sinning. How he went about doing good. Healing the sick, making the blind to see, the lame to walk, the dead to live again. She told me how, despite all that, he was betrayed and led away to a cross where he died. She told me how, if I were the only little boy on earth, he would have died on that cross for me! And, in those hours spent together around the old family Bible, I saw God in my mother.

I have seen God in nature. I have seen God in the beautiful Yosemite Valley. In Mirror Lake which, at sunset, reflects all the surrounding scenery in its crystal clear waters. In the giant Sequoias which tower hundreds of feet upward toward God their maker. In the Yosemite Falls which drop over two thousand feet in a continual roar of praise and thanksgiving to God their creator. In all of the magnificent manifestations of his creative power revealed in nature. Yes, I have seen God.

You say, AOkay, preacher. I'll grant you that. Maybe you are one of those sensitive souls who see God in nature. But have you ever really heard God? Heard him speak to you so you knew he was directing your life?@

### **Hearing God**

I will have to answer again, yes, I have heard God.

I heard God speak to me on what some have called Athe crossroads of the world,@State and Madison Streets in Chicago, Illinois which, at that time, was the busiest intersection in America. I was in the Windy City on business for my freshman class in college. It was the first time I had been in the big city alone, and I walked along State Street in awe, almost reverence, as I stared up at the magnificent structures of stone and steel which towered above me.

Suddenly, I was brought back to earth by a shout. I looked down the street and I saw a crowd of people gathering around someone or something on the corner of State and Madison streets.

Being young and curious, I ran to the corner to see what was happening. By the time I got there, a fairly large crowd had gathered. I couldn't see anything from the edge of the crowd so I elbowed my way through until I stood at the center of the circle. There lay the body of a man whose life had been instantly snuffed out by an unseen force. In one hand he held an unlit cigarette. In the other, a box of matches.

I moved closer and gazed into his face. There I saw a sight which left an indelible mark upon my memory. His mouth and eyes were both open. His mouth was twisted with the after effects of alcohol. His eyes, glazed with the cold horror of death to an unsaved soul, stared into heaven as if pleading for mercy from the God who had given him life and had now, so instantly, taken it away. I stood there for half an hour. I saw the Chicago Fire Department roar up with their artificial respirators and try to arouse some faint spark of life. But it was useless. He was gone.

As I stood there amid that throng of people on the busiest corner in the world, God spoke to me and I heard him say, "Son, souls are dying, do you care?" I don't believe that man realized as he walked down State Street that afternoon, took out a cigarette and prepared to light it, I don't believe he realized that within ten seconds he would be in eternity. But it happened. I don't believe those people walking along the sidewalk realized the man with whom they were brushing elbows would, within ten steps, be in eternity. But it happened. I don't believe that cop directing traffic realized the man walking toward him would drop dead at his feet. But it happened.

And that day, as I stood at the crossroad of the world, God spoke to me and I heard him say, "Son, souls are dying, do you care? Do you really care?" Well, beloved, I do care. That's why I have given my life to spreading the gospel. That's why I am here, speaking to you. I do care that souls are dying, and that your soul, if you are here without Christ, is in jeopardy.

Yes, I have heard God. I have heard God as I knelt beside my bed to pray. I have heard God as I have fingered through the pages of this blessed Book. I have heard God in the cry of a newborn babe. I have heard God in music. Many people have heard God in music.

My father told me this story and, by the way, I have seen God in my father, too. He is a wonderful man and God has used him in a marvelous way. Dad has more faith in his little finger than I have in my entire frame. My hope is that some day, in some way, I will achieve a small part of his greatness. In the eyes of men my father isn't much. But, in the eyes of God he is great and he is rich, and I long to be like him.

Dad told me how one night he was going to church and parked his car on the hill where that church is located. He started across the street when he saw a man staggering down the sidewalk past the church. He stopped to watch him. Dad had worked with men like that for many years. God has used him to feed and clothe nearly three million of them. He knew them and loved them as few people can or do.

Dad said that suddenly the man stopped and cocked his head to one side as if he were listening to something. My father put a hand to his ear so he could listen, too. Out into the night came the words of a song which the congregation was singing,

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
the emblem of suffering and shame.  
But I love that old cross, where the dearest and best  
for a world of lost sinners was slain.®

Dad said the man took his hat from off his head, placed it over his heart and stood there reeling in a drunken stupor as the music inside the church continued,

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
till my trophies at last I lay down,  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
and exchange it someday for a crown.®

As the music stopped, the man placed his hat back on his head and, pressing his fingers to his lips,

he blew a kiss toward heaven, turned around and went back up the hill.

I don't know where he was going that night. Maybe he was going down to the corner saloon to try to drown his sorrows in drink. Maybe he was going a few blocks up farther to the bridge which crosses a river and try to end it all. I don't know where he was going. But I do know that that night, as he staggered down the hill of life, God spoke to him in music. He heard and heeded and God turned him around and sent him back up the hill of life to start again. Yes, beloved, I have heard God.

You say, ANow you're talking my language, preacher. Now you are getting down to where I live. I have always wanted to know God. But I just haven't been able to break through. Tell me, preacher, have you ever felt God? Felt him so you knew he was touching your life?@

### **Feeling God**

And I will answer once again, AYes. I've felt God.@

I felt God in the hour of suffering, as I lay upon my bed, my body on fire with fever, the bed-clothes wet with the sweat of my burning body. As I lay there, I felt God come out of his glory and stand beside me. I felt him put the coolness of his hand upon my brow as he whispered words of comfort and cheer. Yes, I felt God in the hour of suffering.

I have felt God in the hour of sorrow as I stood beside the bed of my mother and watched her make a sweet entrance into her heavenly home. Mom had been sick for many months, a victim of pancreatic cancer which ate away her body until she weighed less than sixty pounds when she died. A few days before she went to be with the Lord, I was scheduled to begin a crusade in a city several hundred miles away. Sensing I might not see her again this side of heaven, I went to her room, got down on my knees beside her bed, and asked her to forgive me for all the stupid things a boy will sometimes do to hurt his mom.

She smiled and said, AOh son, I forgave you for that a long time ago.@ Then I said, AGoodbye,

mom.@ She took my big old hand in hers and gave it a squeeze. I could barely feel it, but I am sure she used every ounce of strength she had. Then she said, ASon, it's not goodbye, its just goodnight, and I'll see you in the morning.@ Thank God, there is a morning coming when I'll see my mother again.

Yes, I felt God. I felt him in the hour of suffering. I felt him in the hour of sorrow. But more wonderful than either of these was to feel him in the hour of salvation.

I felt God one night as I stood before the cross of Christ burdened with a sense of sin. When the preacher invited people to pray the penitent's prayer, AGod be merciful me a sinner,@I did so with all my heart. And, in that moment of salvation, I felt God come out of his great heaven, take my burden of sin from off of me and place it upon his Son. And that night, for the first time, I stood and breathed eternal life! And it was wonderful. It was wonderful.

Yes, I have seen God. I have heard God. I have felt God. But, I have seen him and heard him and felt he because I know him. You see, beloved, I don't know God because I see and hear and feel him. No, I see and hear and feel him because I know him. The Bible says, AExcept a man be born again he cannot see -- he cannot comprehend, he cannot understand -- the kingdom of God.@ People say, AShow me, and I'll believe. Seeing is believing.@ But God says, ANo! Believe and I will show you. Believing is seeing.@

Do you want to see God this morning? Do you want to hear his voice directing your life? Do you want to feel his presence? You can, if you only come to know him. And you can know him, *right now*, if you open your heart and pray the prayer that causes the angels in heaven to sing,AGod be merciful to me a sinner, and save me, for Jesus's sake.@