

## DALLYING WITH DESTINY

"And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." I Kings 20:40.

War raged between Ahab, king of Israel, and Ben-hadad, king of Syria. Ahab won over Ben-hadad with a crushing defeat. Ben-hadad feared his life would be demanded. He sent ambassadors, robed in sackcloth, covered in ashes, and crawling in humility before Ahab to learn what would be the fate of their king. Ahab, gloating in the pride of victory and thus beside himself, said, "Is he yet alive? he is my brother." That meant freedom for Ben-hadad and defeat and trouble for Ahab. He let his enemy slip through his hands.

Retribution came swiftly to Ahab. He was driving along in his chariot. He saw a miserable, dust-covered, wounded man by the roadside. He stopped. The poor looking wretch propped himself upon his elbow and said: "Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, ..... And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Ahab's sense of military trust was touched, and he quickly pronounced judgment upon such negligence. Immediately, the dust covered, wretchlike figure dismantled himself. He was the prophet of the Lord and pronounced judgment upon Ahab in this dramatic fashion. Ahab, after all, was the one who had been busy here and there, and this allowed his prisoner to escape.

This text has a message for us in this hour of high destiny. Responsibilities and obligations are irresistible and inescapable. Change proceeds in a resistless march. Emerson said, "The day is always his who works in it with serenity and great aims."

### I. Busy.

What a word to conjure with! How many responsibilities are shunned! How many opportunities are passed up! How many sins of omission are committed because of a right or wrong use of that word!

"Busy!" Certainly it is right, eternally right, to be busy. Of all the times in history, people are now the busiest. The many-sided life we are living has thrown our age into high gear. We cannot go fast enough. Many of us are not getting anywhere, but we are going just the same. It is criminal not to be busy. Busy people are the ones who do things. Busy people have been the trail blazers of the ages. They have crossed new mountains, charted new seas, discovered new worlds, launched new movements, ventured new projects, defied the impossible, ascended new heights, sounded greater depths, and ushered in new epochs. Busy men and women have defied entrenched wrongs, shattered false customs, broken wicked standards as they have made majestic records.

God is busy. His nations, continents, hemispheres stretch away in all directions, with their enchanting landscapes, ascending mountains, and dividing gorges. But His chief concern is for man, made in His own image and endowed with capacities to be busy for Him in His world. If we will think of God and look at the world today, we cannot keep from being busy. We should have the ardor of the enthusiast, the vision of the pioneer, the passion of the patriot, the inspiration of the reformer, the love of the emancipator, the wisdom of the seer, the zeal of the missionary, and the perseverance of a conqueror.

"Busy!" Yes, we should be busy to the last degree. They were busy men who gave us the telephone, telegraph, and radio. They were busy men who gave us the ocean liner,

through express, automobile, and airplane; cotton gin, loom, and incandescent light; sublime poetry, marvelous music, matchless paintings, great sculpture, deathless literature. They were busy men who introduced Christ into China, Africa, Japan, Russia, and the islands of the seas. A great preacher said, "Don't pray for tasks equal to your strength; pray for strength equal to your tasks. Don't pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men." Theodore Roosevelt said, "I wish to preach ..... the doctrine of the strenuous life!"

## II. Busy Here and There.

While thy servant was busy here and there!" This is the confession of a shirker, a faithless king, a trifler with trusts. "Here and there" is an incriminating confession. It shows looseness, slipshodness, lack of fidelity, betrayal to duty. With what are you busy? The rich fool was "busy here and there." His talents, time, enegeries -- his all was spent for selfish ends. Suddenly, he heard the trumpet voice of judgment pronouncing his doom, "Thou fool!" His cash became his calamity; his riches became his ruin.

Margaret Slattery tells about a poor family. The father worked hard, regularly, but could not support the family. The mother would get up at four o'clock in the morning, trudge to a hotel where she scrubbed floors until just time to go home and cook breakfast for the family. She worked all day at home, prepared supper early and left it on the table for her husband and the children, because the husband got home late, as he walked to save carfare. She went back and worked other hours. In the same city lived a woman who had her breakfast served to her in bed about ten or eleven o'clock. She worked on her fingernails and eyebrows until one or two o'clock, ate lunch, played cards in the afternoon, went to the country club and danced and dined until 2:00 A.M. Then she told her husband that she had to go away for a rest; she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Multitudes are trifling with trivialities instead of careering among sublimities.

Ease and evasion do not develop strong character, rugged spirits and stalwart souls. They do not win the espousal of brave men and women.

"Is this wrong?" one asks. Is it wrong to sleep? That depends. Sleep is one of humanity's chief physical blessings. It is an absolute necessity. But would you sleep when your house was on fire? Is it wrong to play a fiddle? Circumstances will determine. It was heartily commendable for Viola Page to play. Her skill in handling the violin touched every chord of the human soul. On the other hand, it was emphatically wrong for Nero to fiddle while Rome burned. Is it wrong for ships to make up part or all their cargo with toys? While Roman citizens starved, Nero used the nation's ocean-going vessels to carry sand from Alexandria to Rome for the Arena.

It is related that King Henry IV asked the Duke of Alva if he had observed the great eclipse of the sun which had lately happened. "No," he replied, "I have so much to do on earth, that I have no leisure to look up to heaven." Does that statement not photograph the condition and attitude of multitudes of people? Is this not the reason who we do not experience high tides of enthusiasm, the sweep of power, the irresistible wakes of holy influence, that once purged the churches and fired them with holy zeal? We must regain the pristine power if the calls of our generation are to be met.

Multitudes of church people are "at ease in Zion," when foundations are being shaken, when heavens are being rent, when civilization is crumbling, when the darkness of apostasy is deepening, when humanity is crying for the "Bread of Life." Christian people are the only group on earth who have a cure for earth's ills, fears, insanity, and needs. Will we falter, fail, betray a lost world?

We have too much moderation in our churches and too little affirmation. Sin is smiled upon with fawning indulgence. We have fallen from lofty heights to boggy depths; from highlands of compassion to the lowlands of complacency; from the pinnacles of main things to the bowery of almost anything. Once we flamed with fires of compassion, now a warrant of death is hounding our trail. When churches were separate from the world, they were powerful in winning the lost from the world. They have compromised with the world and have lost the respect of the world.

All of us are called to action. This is a day of gravity. The hour is an imperial one, loaded with importance and freighted with destiny. We should not, we dare not fail our Lord nor our people. We are not to do the trivial when immensities call us. The only crime is not in doing something wicked. It is criminal to busy ourselves "here and there," to give priority to nonentities in the midst of immensities, as Milton says, "Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height, and time, and place are lost."

### III. "He Was Gone."

This statement has pathos in it. A death rattle permeates it. It describes one who flirts with life and dallies with destiny. It is odious with unfaithfulness to a trust, and unsightly with the scandal of betrayal. If we are thus guilty, opportunities will flee and priceless possessions will be lost. We may be paralyzed by inordinate wickedness; put to sleep by the narcotic of pleasure; and hypnotized by the lure of wealth. France is a lamentable example.

General Giraud analyzed the causes of the collapse of France. The decline of the family, primacy of pleasure, lure of ease, prostitution of the schools, disregard for discipline from home, to army, unwillingness to work, luxury, spread of venereal diseases, use of alcohol, lack of moral earnestness, and the desecration of the Lord's Day. Apply these tests to America and see how we are following the suicidal course of France. Add to this analysis the declaration of Marshal Petain after the fall of France: "Our soldiers were drunk and would not fight. Since the victory of World War I, the spirit of pleasure, of riotous living and drinking has prevailed over the spirit of sacrifice." These are not the statements of preachers. They are hardened warriors, who do not blink facts.

No wonder Theodore Roosevelt said, "Free peoples can escape being mastered themselves by others only by being able to master themselves." In our effort to free people from slavery and shame, woe betide us if in doing so we dail to free ourselves from the enslavement of ourselves.

"He was gone," describes graphically the danger of the loss of opportunity to be saved. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Eternal life transcends everything in importance, yet we trifle with our souls and with the responsibility of winning souls. Nothing can atone for neglected salvation.

"He was gone."

"There is a time, we know not when,  
A point, we know not where,  
That marks the destiny of men  
To glory or despair."