

A SOLEMN CHARGE

"Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: That the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel."
I Kings 2:1-4.

With the rapid and obvious decline of David's strength and his increasing inability to take care of his administrative duties adequately, due to his growing old, it was apparent to all that his life and reign were swiftly drawing to a close. Three of his sons -- Amnon, Chileab and Absalom -- had died, so Adonijah, the oldest living son of David, with the help of Joab and Abiathar, undertook to usurp the throne. As soon as he determined that he would become the successor to his father, he conspired against him, persuaded all whom he could to join him in the conspiracy, and sought their aid in the accomplishment of his purpose.

When David was informed about Adonijah's revolt, it is noteworthy that the king did not make any direct attack on the conspirators. Instead, he merely gave instructions to the proper persons, Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the brave soldier, to anoint Solomon as king. His instructions were carried out promptly. Solomon was seated on the royal mule, which he rode to Gihon. There Zadok the priest anointed him with the sacred oil out of the tabernacle, and the people responded beautifully with the cry: "God save King Solomon." The conspiracy thus came to naught, and the son of promise occupied the throne. Solomon was wonderfully blessed in that he came to the throne with the favor of God, the blessing of his father, and the endorsement of the people.

As soon as Solomon was crowned, David's last official act was to give his son and successor the following parting and solemn charge: "I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man." The last words of any one are always of interest to those who are left behind. Even the last words of a criminal before he is executed will be read by thousands, who would not have listened to anything he might have said before his arrest and conviction. The last words of good and great men, when spoken to those who are near and dear to them, are therefore of especial interest. David's charge to Solomon was very brief and pointed. What he said was, "Be a man," or "Shew thyself a man." His charge was that of an old man speaking to a young man, a king to his successor, an aged warrior to a young man of peace, a dying man to a man on the threshold of his earthly career, a father to a son, and of a man of experience to one of inexperience. Out of the overflow of a varied, long and rich experience, and spoken just before his going the way of all the earth, David delivered his impressive and unforgettable charge in words of great wisdom. He was exceedingly anxious that his son be equal to the challenges which he would be called upon to face. David urged Solomon to be strong, to behave as a man should, and to obey the Scriptures. He impressed upon him the fact that following his counsel would certainly result in his being the recipient of spiritual prosperity.

God wants us to be strong physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. He would have you to develop a strong body. Also, He wants you to cultivate your mind at the same time. Anyone who devotes his time primarily to physical development is likely to overlook the needs of the other parts of his nature. If all the energy in a man's nature is running to brawn, there will be nothing left to run brain. The men who have compelled the attention of the world have not been physical giants, but rather men of mental and moral strength. Napoleon, Wellington, and Grant were not strong physically. If the ideal consisted only of physical qualities, some animals would be higher in the scale than we are. The ox surpasses a man in muscular strength; the antelope in speed; the hound in

keenness of scent; the eagle in ability to see; the squirrel in acuteness of hearing; the bee in delicacy of taste; and the spider in fineness of nervous energy. Therefore, we cannot measure a man by his physical strength or by his material possessions.

A man's value to the world, as well as to himself, depends largely on the cultivation of his intellect. The quality of our thoughts determines the strength and worth of our characters. Impure thoughts are the worms which eat away the tissues of moral character. Guard sacredly the door of your mind, and keep it closed against the entrance of evil thoughts.

Real manhood requires a strong body, a full-orbed mind, and a well-developed spirit. The source of this threefold strength is God. This strength is obtained from God through our Lord Jesus Christ. No one will attain the ideal of manhood who does not in thought, impulse, purpose, and deed reflect the God in Whom he lives, moves, and has his being. The strength that is needed is that of purpose, dedication, and the determination to do right.

When David charged Solomon in the words, "Shew thyself a man," he did not attach any feeble sense to the term. David was a good judge of manliness. Therefore, to his advice to Solomon to be manly he appended a description of character and a course of action which was manly. Living a Christian life affords one an ample opportunity for manly sentiments and manly courses of action; nay, it makes them necessary. It requires that one live for a great purpose, the greatest one possible. There is manliness in decision, firmness, constancy of purpose, and dependability. It is characteristic of children that they do not know their own minds, that they are the sport of whim and caprice, unsteady, vacillating, easily diverted from their aims, easily discouraged by difficulties, deficient in resolution, concentration, and persistence. To see a grown person tossed about with the wind is pathetic. That is why purpose, concentration, and steadfastness are essential to the development of a truly manly character.

True manliness is to stick to your principles if they are good and right. When President Garfield was a lad at Williams College, he climbed Mount Greylock one day with a number of companions, and they spent the night on the top of the mountain. Seated around a campfire they sang college songs and told stories during the evening. At length Garfield took out of his pocket a New Testament, and said: "Boys, it is my custom to read a chapter before going to bed, and have a prayer. Shall we have it together?" And they all did. We admire the boy for his courage.

When David charged Solomon, saying, "Show thyself a man," he meant for him to be Spirit-controlled, fearless, above all bribery and corruption, and vitally identified with the enduring interests of the people. The book of the law was placed in his hand, and he was challenged to study it, understand it, and apply it. By so doing he would glorify God and be a great blessing to his nation.

In response to this impressive and memorable charge from his father, Solomon immediately went to Gibeon, where the tabernacle was located, for the express purpose of worshiping God. There he placed a thousand burnt offerings on the altar as a sacrifice unto the Lord. What an act of love and devotion! After his day of worship, Solomon fell into a deep sleep. Out of appreciation of the sincerity of his purpose, God appeared to him in a dream, very desirous of disclosing His will to him and of blessing him.

To Solomon God made a most generous proposition: "Ask what I shall give thee." God, the Great Giver, Who always delights to give in large measure, was anxious for Solomon to make it possible for Him to bestow upon him some wonderful gift. He offered him his choice of blessings from the divine storehouse.

How wonderful that God practically set His resources before Solomon! What an opportunity and what a test of character! And yet it is even so with us. God still offers to His children His blank check for bounties from His treasury. Has He not made us the same proposition which He made to Solomon? And in saying, "Ask what I shall give thee," has He not assured us that He is ready and willing to do great things for us?

Our Saviour said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." He is still giving us many opportunities to make our requests, and it is wonderful to know that He is able to do for us far more than we can think or ask. The reason so many of us, as Christians, do not have more is that we do not ask for it. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." Blessings fresh from the Father's bountiful hand are waiting for us, if we will only ask for them. When you need and want something, ask God for it.

Solomon's response to God's offer was prompt. In his prayer the element of thanksgiving came first. He expressed appreciation for the mercy and faithfulness of God in dealing with his father, David. Solomon acknowledged that God had conferred upon him the high privilege of reigning over his people as their king. He was truly grateful for every manifestation of the grace and mercy of God toward his father and himself. His genuine humility was revealed in his admission of a lack of wisdom for the proper administration of the stupendous task which had been committed to him. Realizing his limitations and his utter dependence on God, Solomon made the confession: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." Neither can any of us perform the tasks which have been committed to us without the help of Almighty God.

When God gave Solomon the privilege of asking what he would, he carefully considered his needs before he made his request. There were many things for which he might have ^{asked} pleasure, long life, prosperity, riches, happiness, honor, success, renown, and glory, but he did not do so. He simply asked for "an understanding heart." With becoming modesty and delightful earnestness, he acknowledged his inadequacy for the task that God had given him to do. His immediate need was the gift of discernment to know how to be a good king and thereby please God, Who had given him his opportunity for service.

In response to Solomon's wise request, God was pleased and replied: "Behold, I have done according to thy words." Because Solomon asked for wisdom God gave it to him, but to it He added honor, riches, and victory over his enemies. His choice of the higher proved that he was qualified to be entrusted with the lower. Let us, too, ask God for an understanding heart to discern between good and evil in order that we may always choose the best!