

THE SECRET OF A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

"So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God" (II Chronicles 27:6).

The record of the kings of Israel was one of continual tragedy, but the record of the kings of Judah was different. Not one of them was perfect, but among them there were those who feared the Lord. One of them was Jotham, the worthy son of a good and great father. It is said of him that he "became mighty because he prepared his ways before the Lord." Jotham lived successfully and finished his course with joy.

The circumstances of Jotham's day make it all the more remarkable that this should be the record of his life. He ascended the throne as regent at the time of Uzziah's removal, when the sovereign and the state alike were suffering from the perils of prosperity. National ideals were lowered and national life had deteriorated, primarily because little place was given in the lives of the people to the true worship of God. Despite the current worldliness Jotham steadfastly set himself to realize the highest type of life and leadership, and sought power for this by preparing his ways. Jotham's attitude toward the serious facts of life is the secret of the strength which he acquired and by means of which he exercised such a beneficent influence over his people. To prepare his ways before the Lord will always assure the pure and permanent quality of any man's life.

Power is not so much an acquisition as an accumulation. God does not bestow strength in the same way in which he bestows sunlight and rain. A man becomes mighty only according as he adopts a right attitude toward the claims of God, and according to the way in which he exerts the whole strength of his life toward their obedience. Every man is an individual sovereign reigning over the possibilities of which his life is made up. Character is determined by the attitude of the will, and nothing is so important for any man as a careful review of himself.

I suppose that there is not one of us who does not desire to make the very best of life, and to get out of life's estate the largest and most enduring treasure. How may we succeed? How may we realize the purpose for which we were created? How may we come to the end of the day, and feel that life has been well spent? I suppose there is not one who does not wish that he might turn back the pages of his life's records, and rewrite some of them.

How may we avoid error? How may we resist the temptations by which we are thronged? Here I think is the secret: "Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God."

Let us look for a moment or two at the principle herein enunciated. Jotham is said to have prepared his ways, with the result that he grew in strength until he was generally regarded as a mighty man, and he prepared his ways before the Lord. So do we all need to prepare our ways, and not live life blindly and carelessly, but to do what we do deliberately, intelligently, and because we know the things we do are right.

I. Jotham Established A Proper Relationship With God.

Jotham could not seek counsel of the Lord until he put himself in communication with Him. If we are to prepare our ways before the Lord, we must, first of all,

get into communication with Him, establish a right relationship with Him, and retain Him as our Counselor. Are you in communication with God? Are you so related to Him that you may inquire of Him concerning problems which you will have to face? Are you in right relationship to Him? Can you talk with Him as your Friend and Counselor?

In time of an emergency many say, "How I wish God would help me!" If you want God to help you, then get right in your relationship with Him. Be sure that He is your Friend, that every sin is washed away, and that there is no obstacle to your coming to God to seek His help. Do not wait until some great crisis of life should come, until you get to the place where you feel you need divine direction and yet have no access to God.

Jotham prepared his ways before the Lord. Life's ways need preparing. You need to contemplate the future, and carefully inquire of the Lord. David, though the anointed oil had been poured upon his head, and though he knew that by God's decree he was to be the king of Israel, yet when Saul was dead, and when apparently the path to the throne was opened, David did not take a single step without first inquiring of the Lord. He said: "Shall I go up unto any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up." Then David said, "Whither shall I Go up?" And he said, Unto Hebron." The Lord gave him particular direction.

It is our privilege as believers to prepare our way before the Lord, so as to get the mind of God in respect to all the details of life. The person who cultivates that attitude and habit of life will not be likely to do things precipitately. A Christian should think in terms of the Word and the will of God. He must find out what he ought to do before acting. Prevention is far better than cure. It is better to inquire of the Lord before you take a course than ask the Lord to disentangle you after you find yourself entangled with your own doings.

II. Jotham Retained The Wisest Of All Counselors.

Jotham inquired of the Lord. If you are going to ask advice of anyone, why not get the best advice possible? We are entitled to the best. Jotham went to the wisest of all counselors. He prepared his ways before the Lord, and so should we. God speaks to us in this Book, and if we would prepare our way, we must prepare it before the Lord. Have you learned the secret of bringing all of life into the light of God's Word, and to conform your life to the principle of its teachings? Jotham received advice from the best of all Counselors and never failed to take it. Some people are fond of asking advice, and never taking it. Many ask for advice with no intention whatever of taking it. Many people come to the Bible like that. When you come to the Word of God, do you just listen to it without any idea or intention of obeying its precepts? Jotham prepared his ways; he sought advice. When God gave it to him he obeyed it. That is how to treat the Word of God. Study to see what it says, and, as soon as you know what it teaches, make it the rule of your life.

III. Jotham Became Mighty.

How did Jotham become mighty?

1. He avoided the errors of good men.

He had a good father. Uzziah was his father, and he was a man who lived for a long time, and did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Jotham followed his father only as far as the father followed the Lord. Uzziah made the mistake of usurping the office of the priest. Because he was king he thought he could do anything, so he went into the temple of the Lord to offer a sacrifice before God, and he became a leper, and remained a leper until the day of his death. Good man as he was, he went wrong at one point.

We should follow the examples of our parents just so far as they follow the example of the Lord. We should heed their counsel just so far as their counsel is in accord with the Word of the Lord. If your father was a good man, because he obeyed the Lord, and if your mother was a good woman, because she walked in the will of the Lord, then you are likely to be a good man or a good woman if you walk in the way of the Lord. Instead of getting your counsel second-hand, go to the Lord Himself and get it. If you follow other people, you are likely to copy their mistakes more than their masterpieces, their vices, and their virtues. Do not make any man, however good he may be, your pattern; do not make any woman, however good she may be, your ideal, for the best man or the best woman will lead you astray at some point. The only safe thing to do is to follow the Lord. He will never lead you astray, but will correct you when you do wrong.

2. Jotham refused to conform to the ways of the wicked.

The popular thing is to go with the majority. If you are in a certain circle, then you think you should do as they do. We should have the courage to follow the right course when the majority are taking a wrong course. We need to be strong enough to say: "No," when you ought to say "No," and to say "Yes," when we ought to say "Yes." It takes strength to do that. It does not require much character just to conform to those with whom you associate, but to do what's right does require character. People who say, "Yes," and "No" where they ought to are the people who really do something.

Do you want to be somebody, a mighty man or woman before the Lord? If you do, prepare your way before the Lord, and let the Lord teach you how to live and you will get something done. Jotham built cities and towers, won victories, and finished his course with joy. He lived out a full day of labor before the Lord, and at the end was gathered to his fathers.

Ask yourself this question: "What's the will of God for me?" If you will do that, you, too, shall become mighty and shall not labor in vain. We need strong men and strong women, but only God can make us strong. Let us ask Him to do so.