

THE BLESSING OF UNREALIZED AIMS

"But the Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart: Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name." II Chronicles 6:8-9.

Most of you know the story that lies behind these words. It had been the ambition of David, king of Israel, to build a temple which would be the center of the religious life of his people. For years in vision he had seen it crowning the crest of Mount Zion. Night and day he had thought upon it, planned for it and worked for it. It was his supreme, all-absorbing ambition to build a house for God. Every other aim was subordinate to this. While he was quite anxious to make Israel strong, to subdue her enemies and to extend her dominions, over and above all of that he wanted to get the temple built. The temple was in his heart. Queen Mary is reported to have said to her courtiers that after her death they would find the word Calais graven upon her heart, so long had she brooded over the loss of that French sea-coast town. Likewise, if one could have examined David's heart, he would have found graven upon it the picture of a temple. Plutarch told us that the Roman Cato was so possessed by the conviction that there could be neither peace nor safety for Rome so long as Carthage remained strong that he never made a speech in the Roman senate without concluding with the sentence, "Delenda est Carthage," meaning, "Carthage must be destroyed." So, in much the same way David never let a day pass without saying to himself, "God's house must be built. It is not fit that I should dwell in a house of cedar while the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." Every day of his long reign David said some such word as that to his soul.

All through his days of active campaigning as a warrior David had dreamed of building a temple, and, now that his wars were over, he felt that the time for fulfilling his ideal had come. He discussed the matter with Nathan the prophet, his intimate adviser, who assured him that God would bless the enterprise. But the very next morning Nathan returned with the message that God did not want David to build the temple. But, at the same time, the promise was given him that his son would take up the work, and one day, after David himself had passed away, the temple would stand complete on Mount Zion.

Nathan's message, we can well believe, was a great disappointment to David. For David, with all of his numerous faults, was a man with the love of God in his heart. It must have been a terrible blow to him to be told that he was not to build the temple; for the temple was intended to be his masterpiece, and in it he had meant to express his soul's devotion to God. Nathan saw how bitter David's disappointment was, and so he went on to say that God accepted the will for the deed. "Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for My Name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." God saw and appreciated at its proper value the love that filled the heart of His servant, and, even though David's dream remained unrealized in his own experience, God rejoiced to know it existed, and one day, He said, it would assuredly find its concrete embodiment. God encouraged him with the message, "David, I have looked and I have been glad to see the temple in thy heart. Notwithstanding, thy hands stained with blood shall never build My temple. One who came from thy loins, thy son, shall build it."

It is well to remember that the unfulfilled ideal and the unrealized aim are not confined to David. In our inner natures we carry our dreams, our loves, our purposes, our plans and our ideals. There life has its studio. Likely each of us has in some way or other shared David's disappointment. All of us have had our dreams, and as we have grown older we have seen them melting away and their chances of realization becoming increasingly remote. Many of us have cherished holy, beautiful and worthy dreams that have never come to fruition. As we look back on these unfulfilled ambitions of our lives, there is in all of us a certain measure of disappointment. We are not what we hoped we were going to be, and life as we know it now is a very much smaller thing than we meant that it should become.

So often one's vision does not materialize. There are Christian workers everywhere who have dreamed of great achievements for God, but their splendid dreams have never come to fruition, because, for one reason or another, circumstances have been unfavorable. The will was there, but not the power. We have seen in Christ the manhood or womanhood God meant us to achieve, and for that we have prayed and striven daily. The purer mind, the stronger will, the more generous sympathy are things for which we have craved, but our dreams remain unfulfilled.

It was in the heart of David to build a house in the name of the Lord, and yet he never built it. He collected vast stores of material and made lavish preparations, but he never saw one stone laid upon another. He was destined not to see the great house of his desire. He went down to his grave with his great purpose unrealized, with the hope he had cherished in his heart unfulfilled. Why was David destined to this great disappointment? It was because he was a shedder of blood.

I. The Tragedy Of Incompleteness.

This incident is an illustration of the great tragedy and bitterness of human life. The bitterness of human life is not its brevity, but its incompleteness. Such incompleteness is the very badge and sign of the average human life. Occasionally we may come across a Simeon who feels that life has given him all he desired and hoped, and who therefore can say, "Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." But the vast majority of people do not want to depart, for the simple reason that they have not seen the fulfilment of all that was in their hearts. There are hopes which they have not realized, plans they have not perfected and tasks which they have not finished.

Think of the great saints of the Old Testament. The life of every one of them ends in disappointment. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees to receive a country for an inheritance, and he died without owning a single yard in Canaan except a grave. Jacob cherished the same great hope, and he died a stranger in a strange land. Joseph lived for the same great ambition, and his record ends with a "coffin in Egypt." Moses inherited the same glorious purpose. To establish Israel in their promised home in Canaan was the task to which he gave his life. He succeeded in bringing Israel out of Egypt. By the slow and hard training of the weary wilderness years he succeeded in converting a rabble of slaves into a compact and strong nation. He brought them to the very edge of the promised land, but he never saw them settled there. "And Moses died in Moab." In Moab!--the land of disappointment and failure. He missed his aim. He never accomplished his purpose. And that was where David died, too, in the land of disappointment. And that is where all men die--in Moab. Only One in the world's history accomplished everything he set out to do. Jesus came forth from the Father to redeem the world, and He redeemed it.

He offered the full, perfect and complete oblation and sacrifice, so that in dying He could say, "It is finished." But for the rest of us--we never finish. Death always comes to us before we do. We want more time. Our tasks are never done. Achievement never answers to intention. We dream of temples which never get built. The grave is more than the burying place of lifeless bodies. It is the burying place also of many great ambitions and noble hopes.

II. The Blessing Of Temples In The Heart.

His failure to build the temple of his dreams was the great disappointment and bitterness of David's life. And yet the significant fact is that David was a richer and nobler man for cherishing this dream that never got realized. "'Tis better to have loved and lost," said Tennyson, "than never to have loved at all." And it is infinitely better to have dreamed great dreams and failed to realize them, than never to have dreamed at all. David was a better man for this dream of a temple which he cherished. There was blessing in his great purpose that never got fulfilled.

1. It was a blessing to David.

Nobody can live with a great purpose without being ennobled by it. Little aims make little men, but great aims make great men. There is a refining, enriching influence in the mere possession of a lofty purpose. There were faults enough in David's career. But through all of his faults the essential greatness of the man shines forth, and his greatness is due to the greatness of his ambition. David's heart was chiefly set, not upon wealth, not upon military fame, not upon vast territories, but upon the glory of God. To build a house for the Lord was his supreme desire. That great and holy purpose helped to make David a "man after God's own heart." David did not accomplish his desire, but the mere cherishing of it made him a better man. A great purpose though unrealized is pregnant with blessing. You cannot make life happier by discarding great ambitions on the score that they cannot be fulfilled. So, never let the fact of unfulfilled ideals discourage you. Whether you know it or not, your ideals are drawing you on--on from the commonplace levels where you might easily live--on to the manhood or womanhood God wants you to have. The nobler the dream you cherish the richer the blessing it will leave behind. Paul let us into the secret of his greatness when he wrote, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

2. It was a blessing to those who came after David.

It is quite true that David never built the temple. But, was it all for nothing that he had made such vast preparation and collected such stores of material? No, it was not for nothing. Solomon could never have built the temple, had not David his father cherished the hope of building one. The materials David collected, Solomon used. The dream of the father became the deed of the son. God said to David, "Thou didst well that it was in thy heart."

Not only did David sketch the plans and collect the materials, but what is of even greater consequence, he kindled the fire in Solomon's heart and made him feel that his first business as a king was to get God's temple built. By his enthusiasm David created in Solomon a love for his own ideal, and the thing that he himself never actually achieved he inspired his son to accomplish.

It is just like that still. A man does well to cherish a great purpose in his heart. He may never see the fulfilment of it, but because he cherished it, and labored for it, others may see the realization of it.

So it often has been. Many a man has cherished a dream that has moulded the lives of his children. He has talked of it, prayed for it, worked for it, and the children have caught the contagion of their father's devotion. The ideal has become the dominating factor in all the father's thoughts, and instinctively the children have accepted it and, under perhaps more favorable conditions and circumstances, have carried out their father's ambition.

To all appearances people have died in vain, because the thing they gave their life for was still unrealized and unaccomplished. But they have left the world a priceless heritage, and the thought, the vision and the ideal they conceived some later generation has taken up and made its own, and the unfulfilled ideal has at last found its embodiment. No great ideal is born of God's Spirit in the heart of a man for nothing. Somehow, somewhere, the dream must end in achievement. "The vision is for an appointed time." Every noble ideal releases in our hearts energy that abides forever.

Cherish great purposes and noble hopes. You may not live to see them realized, but the world will be the better for them.

The world stands where it does just because in every age there have been men brave enough to give their lives to great causes and splendid ambitions, though they never lived to see them fulfilled. They labored and we have entered into their labors. Link yourself on to great causes. The world will be the better for it.

God spoke to David saying, "Thou didst well that it was in thy heart." God took David's will for his deed, and placed a finished temple to his account. It is not to Solomon's credit only that the temple is placed. It is put down to David's too, for David would have built it if he could. And David's labors made Solomon's achievement possible. It was not wasted effort on his part. God is generous, rewarding for what people really meant to do, but were not permitted to do.

What proof do we have that the temple was in David's heart? The stores he collected and the preparations he made prove it. There could not be any mistake about his sincere desire to build a house for God.

How shall you know that to be like Christ is really your desire and aim? Well, ask yourselves what preparations you are making for the realization of your desire. Faith always proves itself by works. And if this desire is really in the heart it will soon reveal itself in the life. Saying that you want to be like Christ is not enough. You must work at it. Is it your first and chief concern to be like Him?