

"WITH ALL THE HEART"

"And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." II Chronicles 31:21.

Although Hezekiah was one of the best kings that ever sat upon the throne of Judah, the conditions of his early life were very much against him. His father, Ahaz, was a notoriously wicked man. His youth was cursed by a most polluted parental example. The moral atmosphere in which he lived was tainted with all the abominations of Oriental idolatry. He grew up amid the sensual luxuries and splendid corruptions of a licentious court.

There are young men today whose conflict with temptation is especially difficult, not only because the example that has been set them at home has been evil, but because they carry in their own persons the seeds of evil habits in which their fathers indulged. Perhaps it is so with some of you; and you know it all too well.

Divine grace can root out the foulest desire and enable you to stand. The young Hezekiah not only preserved his virtue, but became a devout man. In the Apocrypha he is bracketed with David and Josiah --these three being described as "the only kings of Judah that did not forsake the law of their God." I expect that he owed his happy career, under God, to the influence of a pious mother. We do not know much about her, except that she was the daughter of a godly man named Zechariah, "who had understanding in the visions of God." I venture to believe that she shared her saintly father's piety, and bestowed on her son all of her care, rearing him in the fear of God. I can visualize her taking him aside and praying with him, reading to him portions of the Book of the Law, instilling its principles into his youthful mind, and warning him of the paths of folly; and these instructions, together with her own gentle influence and beautiful example, being the means, under God, of leading the young man in the right way. All mothers do well to remember that their impress is often stamped upon their sons.

Most great and eminently successful men have commenced life under peculiarly unfavorable conditions. It is the exception rather than the rule that a youth, brought up under all manner of advantages of wealth, rank and education, has, by dint of his own pluck and energy, forced his way to the front, and commanded brilliant success. I could enumerate many names, never to be forgotten in history, who rose from the humblest ranks, and by sheer thoroughness and perseverance gained step by step until they reached the top of the ladder. Don't any of you ever say that, because your origin happens to be humble, and your means small, you have but a poor chance in life.

Hezekiah was a real man of God; and his wonderful energy of character sprang out of his fervid piety. In II Kings we read: "and the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went." The next chapter says: "God gave him substance very much; and Hezekiah prospered in all his works." Three times then it is mentioned that he was a prosperous man. Now, worldly prosperity, as you know, is not in itself a token of the divine favor. Bad men often prosper. So many instances of it did David see that he was filled with painful perplexity; he could not understand it; it almost seemed to him at one time as though heaven put a premium upon wickedness. But "when he went into the sanctuary of God" he got over his difficulty; when he looked deeper into things, he perceived that the prosperity of ungodly men is but short-lived and superficial, and does not bring any real and abiding satisfaction with it. The only prosperity worthy of the name is that of the person who is dwelling in the smile and favor of God.

Other kings had revered Jehovah. They had done something toward restoring His worship. They had not broken with idolatry, but they had tried to hold on to the Lord. But Hezekiah would not make any concessions; with him it was everything or nothing; all that he did, he did with his whole heart. The record does not tell us anything about his intellectual eminence. It is not recorded that he was a genius. The one thing that stood out bright and shining was that Hezekiah was a whole-hearted man. He always gave everything that he

had. Then the Bible in that quiet way it has, when telling something of tremendous moment, adds that being a whole-hearted man he prospered.

So we are taught here that old and vital truth that whole-heartedness is the condition of prosperity. It is a truth that even the youngest needs to learn, and that the oldest cannot afford to overlook.

Two men were talking about another who had failed in business. They were discussing the causes of his failure, and one said, "I don't wonder that he failed. He did not put anything into his business; he did not even put himself in it." That was not the kind of man that Hezekiah was. If you and I could only read the long story of human failure, I think we would find that the chief reason for failure is that people have not put themselves into their work with unswerving energy of heart and will and grappled with their problems and tasks.

Brains tell, and will tell to the end. There are many tasks that never could be done without a high endowment of intelligence. Nevertheless, I am convinced of this, that for every time that men fail through lack of brains, twenty times they fail through lack of heart. Hezekiah wrought with all his heart and prospered, even though his work was that of the reformation of his nation. Yours may be the lowliest of tasks, but, if it is, give yourself wholly to it; determine that you will do it well and with all your heart, and the issues shall be larger than you dream.

Something like this was in Paul's mind when he wrote Colossians 3:23, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Do it heartily, for that is the way to nobility of character and to fellowship with the Lord. Slackers and shirkers need not expect to have fellowship with Him. Christ was the most whole-hearted toiler who ever labored in any human ministry, and to be like Him you must know Him as He is. All that He did He did with all His heart. He never shirked the hardest or the most unpleasant tasks. He said: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). He never faltered once. He never looked for the easy way. The pity of half-hearted work is that it misses the gladness of it all. When a man is doing his part with all his heart, you can generally tell it as the years go by: his face shines although he is not aware of it. The half-hearted are irritable and easily provoked. There is music everywhere in this strange universe, but the half-hearted man does not hear any of it. Much of the heavenly music which was ringing in the ears of Christ was due to His splendid absorption in His calling. Christ said: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). By day and night, in prayer and word and healing, all that He did He did with His whole heart.

Hezekiah was willing to work. He did not seek or expect success without toil. He set to work to remove hidden and open idolatry. Ahaz, his father, had done all he could to check the worship of God, and therefore Hezekiah had the tremendous task of trying to undo the evil which had been wrought. The "service of the house of God" attracted and called forth the attention of the king. Religion was not beneath his dignity, interest and concern. He sought to gain purity, to keep down envy and pride, and to overcome lust.

Nothing worthwhile is going to be accomplished without work. Sir Walter Scott said, "Depend upon it, there is nothing to be had without labor." Horace Greely said, "The darkest hour in any man's earthly career is that wherein he first fancies that there is some easier way of gaining a dollar than by squarely earning it." Andrew Carnegie said, "When I was a telegraph operator in Pittsburgh, I knew all the men who speculated. I have lived to see all of them ruined — bankrupt in money and bankrupt in character. There is scarcely an instance of a man who has made a fortune by speculation and kept it.

Hezekiah concentrated his energies and efforts. He began his reign by exalting God and humbling himself. He did not begin a half-dozen things at once, and drive away his energy

upon them; he did not commence one thing until he had finished another. Some people remind us of the idle warrior made of tin on the top of a weather-vane, bravely bending to his gun and ready to fire, but swinging round to every point of the compass, and of no use whatever, but to tell how the wind blows. Sir Joshua Reynolds was one of the most distinguished artists of his day; and in answer to the inquiry how he attained to such excellence, he replied, "By observing one simple rule, namely, to make each painting the best." There is much truth in an old Latin proverb which says, "He who follows two hares is sure to catch neither." Emerson said, "The one prudence in life is concentration, the one evil is dissipation." There is a proverb which says, "A canoe is paddled on both sides," which means that to succeed you must do one thing at a time, and do it well with all your heart and all your powers. There is a work for every person. Each of us should help others. We can cheer, stimulate, encourage and direct others. It is not right for any of us to let life slip away from us without specific efforts to help and to elevate others.

Hezekiah did his work thoroughly and with all his heart. There was neither hesitation nor half-heartedness about him. He threw himself heart and soul into everything he undertook, and met with almost uninterrupted success. What he did, he did with all his heart. Under his direction everything was carried out and completed with a vigor and determination that showed that both his heart and his hands were in the work.

There were some phases of his reforming work that were more congenial to Hezekiah than others. All the phases of his work did not have the same appeal. He had his likes and dislikes, and his special aptitudes. Who doesn't? But Hezekiah never let that interfere with his attitude. Whether it was a big or a little thing, he put everything he had into it. He tackled the things that did not come easy for him. The fine and really heroic thing about Hezekiah was this, that he wrought with his whole heart in everything. He trampled down his personal likings, and went on to perform his duties, whether they were pleasant or unpleasant, easy or hard. With full energy of heart and soul, he grappled with the very tasks he disliked. And no man will ever amount to much, or prosper with any real prosperity, who has not mastered Hezekiah's secret. There are certain things you like to do. There are other things you loathe to do. There is no other way to a clear and approving conscience and to a noble character than to do every separate thing with a whole heart. We owe far more to our unwellcome duties than we shall ever know until secrets are revealed. Things that we think we cannot do at all are often the things which do the most for us. The very effort to do what is uncongenial and distasteful is the way to the place where all the singing is.

As a general rule, it is true in every age and the world over that the person who is thorough-going and painstaking, and "in every work that he begins, does it with all his heart," will, and does prosper. An estimable gentleman in the House of Commons in the British Parliament was approached by a snob, whose father's servant this gentleman had once been, and the snob had the impertinence to try to insult him by saying, "Why, you once blacked my father's boots." The gentleman replied, "Yes, and didn't I black them well." Ask any man who has been particularly prosperous in some line of business, and he will tell you that he largely owes his success to the fact that he started with the fixed resolve, that, whatever he took in hand, he would do it with his whole heart and to the best of his ability. I commend to you as your example this man Hezekiah who in every work that he began he did it with all his heart. Thoroughness is the best policy.

With reference to your work for the Lord, take as your motto the words of our text: "And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." Let us do more and better work for our Lord than we have ever done. Let us do our very best, and serve Him with a greater zeal than ever before. Let us put our whole hearts into our daily living for the Lord. If we will do so, He will crown our efforts with success.