

A GENUINE LIFE

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption." Acts 13:36.

Thus the Apostle Paul summarized the life of David, who was perhaps in his way the most brilliant and forceful character in the public history of Israel. There is a biography in this brief epitaph. It reveals the secret of his great career. There is no time wasted over details. We are introduced at once to the purpose, the method, and the spirit of the man commemorated.

However, the text is of more than historical interest. While it embalms a memory, it also indicates an ideal. It is a philosophy as well as a biography. It presents life and death in their higher aspects.

The first question in life is not how to make a living, but how to make a life. Making a living is a mere incident in life, an important incident to be sure, but an incident, nevertheless. Making a life is the primary mission of all our earthly experiences. The highest and best contribution you can make to your generation is the gift of a well-rounded and worthy life.

I. The Reality Of A Genuine Life.

There is nothing so lovely as right living, and nothing so difficult. The truth about life is that it is service. The business of life is service. Just here is the supreme test of life, the test of service. The Master said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He also said, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." What the world needs is service. Its wounds cannot be healed, its wrongs cannot be righted, its grievances cannot be redressed, its injustices cannot be corrected, and its ignorance cannot be dissipated except by service.

It is by service that we vindicate our faith in any and every realm of life. Faith lifts, achieves, and arrives in service. Great believers are always great doers.

Once the world's standard of greatness was physical. Then it was that Hercules was fairly worshipped. Here emerges that ghastly doctrine that might makes right. With many people, the chief standard of greatness is financial. The late President Taft certainly sounded a most timely admonition to our nation, to the effect that the enthronement of the spirit of materialism in the fabric of our country's life contributes the most serious menace to our civilization and to the security of our Republic. The true wealth of a country is not financial and material, but moral and spiritual. "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, where wealth accumulates and men decay."

A far higher standard of greatness than the physical or the financial is the intellectual. Knowledge is power. The sure foundations of states are laid, not in ignorance but in knowledge. Think of a man without money and without an army, inspiring millions by his pen, as did John Bunyan, or as did William Shakespeare.

But we have not yet reached the highest standard of greatness. What is that standard? Christ tells us that he who would be the chiefest of all must be the servant of all. The true business of every life, whether it be endowed with five talents, or two, or one, is whole-hearted and unselfish service.

As a rule, God calls His servants, whom He raises to the highest honor, from the lowest obscurity at the beginning, that His grace might be the more abundantly manifested, and His glory the more graciously seen. David was raised from the

lowliest position of life to circumstances the most exalted, and in character and influence the most sublime. His life was one of rare powers, of rich and varied endowments, of wide-ranging experiences, and of most exquisite sensibilities. It was a life of real service.

The first need for such service is personal character. The man who would best help the world in which he lives must begin with himself. If a life is to be rich in service, it cannot be poor in its spiritual fellowships. In order to do the best we must be the best. There are very few truths that need more to be emphasized than this one, and particularly in this age with all its haste after riches or pleasure, with its constant pressure of many duties, and with its dependence upon the material and its forgetfulness of the spiritual.

II. The Range Of A Genuine Life.

David served his own generation. "He was a worker for his generation." The word 'generation' reminds us that human existence is not like that of some other objects with which we are familiar. For instance, it is not like the sun or the stars that shine on the same century after century; nor even like a river that flows perpetually. Generation is a word that suggests the idea of coming, passing along, passing away, and being succeeded.

Our generation is our opportunity. We cannot do anything for David's generation, nor for our grandfathers' generation, but we can serve our own generation. As we serve the present generation we will be serving all future generations. When we bring boys and girls to Christ, we will be working for unborn generations, and our influence will never be lost. Although we may not be able to do great things, let us not fail to do many little things which will tell on numerous individuals.

"David served his own generation."

1. David served as a Shepherd.

His early life was an humble one. In youth he guarded a few sheep, leading them forth in the morning, finding grass and water for them, and returning them safely to the fold at night. This brave and healthy boy, with a leather sling at his waist, and a shepherd's staff in his hands, was as happy, useful, and contented as the day was long.

It is the lesson we find so often in the Bible, of the dignity and the worth and the wide-reaching influence of honest work, however humble it may be.

David kept his few sheep and thereby served his own generation. What the world wanted from David just then was that he be a good shepherd. Every man who shirks his work impoverishes the world, and lowers the whole of human life. Every man who does honest and useful work and puts character into his works adds to the sum of goodness in the world. He makes it easier for all the rest to be good and faithful too.

2. David served as a Singer.

It adds a peculiar charm to David's life when we think of him as a singer. When the moody madness was upon the king, David's harp could work wonders.

"God sent His singers upon earth,
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again."

Happy are they who have this gift, and who know to what high and holy ends it may be used. There is no brighter, sweeter service than that of those who bring music into life and chase away its sadness.

3. David served as a Sovereign.

When the shepherd became the sovereign, he was a shepherd still, the shepherd

of Israel, the servant of his people. Gift with all the authority of power, and gifted with all the resources of genius, and housed amid the wealth and luxury incident to his regal station, this man served. The obligation of service expands with the increase of our opportunities; and where much is given much is required.

If God is pleased to spare a man so long as to reach the fullness of old age, that man really lives through nearly three generations; and yet it is only upon one of them that even he can exert an active influence. The first generation with its various educational forces moulds him. The second generation he may distinctly impress with his own individuality; of it he may become one of the potent forces. On the third he can only exert a passive influence. Perhaps we should divide the generation in which we live into three parts and say: ---

- (1) Serve the part of the generation that is setting.
Some are like the sun going down in the west; soon, they will be gone. Comfort, strengthen, help, and serve them all you can.
- (2) Serve the part of the generation that is shining.
Those in middle life are like the sun at its zenith. Help them all you can.
- (3) Serve the part of the generation that is rising.
Young people are like the sun in the east, as yet scarcely above the horizon. In them lies the hope for the future. They are the most reachable. You can get at them. They are the most impressionable. Those converted when they are children usually make the best Christians.

The life of every one ought to be profitable to his or her contemporaries. Our own generation has immediate claims upon us. The dead are not touched by our influence or moved by our activities. So far as the living are concerned -- there are prayers to be offered, ignorant ones to be instructed, fallen ones to be rescued, errors to be corrected, lonely hearts to be ministered to, and wounded ones to be healed. We should serve our generation because it has served us, it is the only age we can directly serve, it is the will of God for us and therefore it is right that we should do so.

III. The Rule For A Genuine Life.

"The will of God" is that rule. In the making of a worthy and genuine life, the question of life's ruling motive is all important. Motive oxygenizes all life. Life's battles are largely won or lost, according to their ruling motives. Life is dominated by one of three motives: --

1. Selfishness.

This is the lowest of all motives. It always ruins. Selfishness, in any and every form, whether in a life, a home, a church, an organization, a state, or a nation, shrivels and withers and blights its possessors, sooner or later, and without a single exception.

2. Altruism.

This is a far higher motive. It means devotion to the interests of others. It involves the sacrifice of self for the welfare of others. Many blessings follow in the wake of such motive. But, it is not sufficiently strong for the weighty burdens and fiery tests of life.

3. The will of God.

This is the crowning and only adequate motive for life. It will be a losing battle in life for every one who ignores the will of God. It will be a triumphant battle for every one who obeys the will of God.

"He always wins who sides with God.

To him no cause is lost."

He has a plan for every one of our lives. We have just one chance at the earthly life. It will soon be gone. The supreme matter of this life is to find and follow the will of God. No man can live right except by the will

of God. His will is that we shall serve our generation. This we do by: --

- (1) Manfully resisting the evils that afflict our generation.

We are not faithful to our God or our generation if we let any phase of social, political or moral evil grow up in our midst unchallenged and unresisted. And in this our Lord has left us His holy example. And the man who faithfully serves his generation may be sure of this -- his influence will never fade out; will never die.

- (2) Being our very best in it.

Every generation needs examples for constant inspiration. We can keep the moral standard up and raise it higher. But, this can only be done by lives, by examples, by genuine character.

- (3) Witnessing for the Lord in it.

Every generation wants and needs men and women who really believe in God, and make it plain to everybody that they do believe in Him. Thus David brought the consciousness of the reality and presence of God to men whenever he came into relations with them.

All success is based upon the principles of working in accordance with the will of God.

IV. The Reward For A Genuine Life.

"He was added unto his fathers."

David must go the way of all flesh. Neither the love of God, nor the admiration of his people, nor his eminent fidelity, can exempt him from the universal decree. As the tired laborer, when his daily toils are ended, wends his way to his much loved home, and calmly lays down to rest, without a thought of anxiety or dread, glad that the hour has come and thankful for the provision for it; so David fell on sleep. It is sweet language indeed. It ought to be remembered though that he did not go to sleep until his work was done. When his work was done he did fall on sleep. His dying was just like going to sleep. It is usually so with God's people. Some die with considerable pain; but, as a rule, when believers pass away, they just shut their eyes on earth and will open them on the resurrection day.

David's reward was twofold. It was both human and Divine. Men honored him. God crowned him. God will never forget one's work of faith and labor of love. "Added unto his fathers" does not refer to his burial, but to his disembodied spirit being added to those of his fathers in the regions of the departed. "And he saw corruption" refers to the dissolution of his body. "Added unto his fathers" is an expression that recognizes the existence of the soul in a future state.

What a blessed thing to close a career by resting after labour! We shall all soon go down. Let not our last hours be spent in hankering after pleasures, or in tears for their lost opportunities, but let them be spent in holy anticipations of the rest that remains for the people of God.