

LIFE'S A JOURNEY

"And the Lord said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give unto them." (Deuteronomy 10:11)

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me."
(Acts 22:6)

There are two classes of people: the ones who master life and the ones who are mastered by the circumstances of life. There are those who develop inner resources so they are able to face life courageously. There are others who find life to be difficult, and they are constantly trying to evade or run away from it. Among the latter are those who give way to self-pity. They spend their time thinking of themselves and what happens to them, how life has dealt them a cruel blow, and how it has been unfair to them. They are constantly tempted to retreat from life rather than to face it.

One task of a church and one purpose of preaching is to increase the number of individuals who can face life and stand up to its problems, and to diminish the number of persons who are defeated by the circumstances of life. We are to help them to be what they ought to be, and to endure what they should not attempt to avoid.

Honesty compels us to admit that we have known times when we were on the heights, when life was interesting and full of joy, and that we have known days when we were in the depths, when life was a burden, a monotonous round of tasks which brought little satisfaction. No man ever solves his problems by running away from them. When you run away you take yourself along, and you are your own greatest problem.

Dr. Henry Hitt Crane of Detroit said: "Each one of us should do something every day that we do not want to do but know we should do, to strengthen our back bone and put iron in our soul." Professor Arnold Toynbee told a story about the English North Sea fishermen who go out for several weeks in their trawler fishing for herring. They have tanks of water on board their trawler in which they put the fish in order to keep them alive and in as good a condition as possible. They discovered, however, that most of the herring came into port rather flabby. But there was one captain who had learned a secret the others had not discovered; for some reason his fish were very lively and looked like they had just been pulled out of the ocean. Finally, he revealed his secret. For every thousand herring that he put in a tank on board his trawler, he put in several big catfish to chase the herring. While they always ate a few of the herring, they kept the rest of them in such lively condition that they were just as fresh as when they had been caught.

If we take the easy road through life, we can become flabby like the herring that did not have the catfish to chase them. On the journey through life we are constantly tempted to take the easy road -- to be overcome with inertia, to be satisfied with things as they are, to be content to do merely those things we want to do -- until we are in danger of becoming flabby.

Life is difficult at best. Under the most favorable conditions it is a struggle. The problems that press along from day to day -- the dull, monotonous routine of life -- that is what gets us down, that is where the struggle really is. There is an advantage in disadvantages, for circumstances are forever testing us. We are growing or we are becoming flabbier all the time, for how we react determines what we are and what we shall become.

A sympathetic friend said to a young woman who was a cripple from infantile paralysis, "Affliction does so color the life." "Yes," she said, "and I propose to choose the color." The choice is always left to us as to how we shall react. The same circumstances that give one man a chance to realize the advantage of disadvantages defeat another person. The difference is in the quality of one's inner resources, the presence or absence of self-discipline, and the ability to stand up and face life rather than to try to evade it.

Life is an eternal struggle, but it is not too much of a struggle if we look beyond ourselves for the power that comes from God, Who has called us and all things into being. If we will only give Him a chance, God will release in and through us sufficient power for any problem which we must face. It is the difference between a land-locked lake that does not have any power and a great river running down through the gorges with tremendous energy that can be controlled for a desired purpose.

The difficulty with most of us is that we turn to this power beyond ourselves only in the great emergencies of life. And then we wonder why it is that the power that others talk about does not come into our lives. The discovery of this source of power is one of those things that a man must find before the crises descend upon him. We must depend on God and be willing for Him to change us. Most of us want God to do things for us in our way. God doesn't do business that way. If we are going to get help from this source, we must be willing to let God take charge of us and change us, no matter what that does to our pet theories and our established habits. Life is an eternal struggle, but it is one in which we can win if we look to a power beyond ourselves, for there must be an intake if there is to be an outgo that enables us to be victorious over the difficulties and circumstances of life.

We should live life in all of its richness and fullness. Life can be lived in such a way that the heart is filled with wonder at the potential possibilities wrapped up in it. The tragedy of life is that we may exist through many days and never discover its meaning, never know the joy of loving people, sharing their sorrows, and leaving the world a little better because we journeyed through it. We can drift through life, or we can live it all our days.

We have a way of breaking life up into stages. We like to set for ourselves immediate or near destinations and to work toward them. We think of certain periods of our lives as preparation for life that is going to begin out yonder somewhere. For example, for many college or university is just four years to be endured, to exist through, that one might get into life itself, or into his vocation, or to get married -- and really begin to live. But people with this attitude miss so much that college or university should mean. If we do not feel that it is a glorious opportunity to live life now in all its fullness, we miss something that we can never recapture. But this period of preparation is also a

time for living. How it is lived will go a long way toward determining the direction of a man's life afterwards.

Take another area of life: Here is a man who works hard at his job, all the time saying to himself, "I will be glad when I come to the age of retirement and can draw my pension. Then I'm going to begin to enjoy life."

Mark Rutherford, one of the lesser lights of the Victorian period, spent thirty years of his life as a writer, not doing very well, but enjoying it. And then he was appointed to a position as a high clerk in the Admiralty Office. For thirty years he labored at his desk at a time when the British Navy meant much for the peace of the world, and the thing he was doing was important and worth while. He spent the last ten years of his life writing his memoirs. He gave much space in his autobiography to the first thirty years -- those were the glorious years -- and to the last ten years when he was writing again. He dismissed the thirty years of significant work with the British Admiralty Office with just four words: "I never liked it." He existed through thirty years doing things he did not like to do. He had missed the whole purpose of life. He had made it a destination, while life is a journey, and every day is a precious opportunity to live it in work and play.

When we consider life as a journey, we do not mean it is after the pattern of a river entering a swamp, spreading itself out in every direction and losing all its strength and beauty. Rather, life is a journey with meaning and purpose to be found in the living of it. Life will be a stalemate, a great burden, unless one has discovered some worthy purpose for living. All too many people stumble blindly through their years, never quite knowing why they are here, what possibilities there are within them, and what they can hope to accomplish. Given a purpose sufficient to draw one out of himself and to give his life direction, the living of it becomes meaningful.

"One ship drives east and another drives west.
With the selfsame winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales,
Which tells us the way to go.

Like the winds of the seas are the ways of fate,
As we voyage along through life:
'Tis the set of a soul
That decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife."

---Ella Wheeler Wilcox,
"The Winds of Fate"

Life is not primarily achievement. It is not the arrival at a goal so much as the pursuit of one. The Declaration of Independence tells us we have a natural right to the pursuit of happiness. But we should not identify life with the pursuit of happiness. Most of us have discovered that, if we really want to be happy, we must never pursue happiness. If we center our attention on ourselves, we will never find happiness. Happiness is always a by-product of some other activity and some other interest. The best way to be happy is to strive to make

somebody else happy, to lose one's self in the interest and service of another, to concentrate on his needs and his happiness. The Declaration of Independence might well have said: "There is a natural right to the happiness of pursuit." The happiness of pursuit of good ends is the only happiness we have much chance of finding.

Life is a journey in which everyday experiences, relationships and opportunities are prized for themselves. The sources of happiness, joy, and satisfaction in life lie close at hand, not far away. We find them every day along life's journey or our eyes will be blinded to them forever.

Think of the thrill of learning something new. Then, there is the joy of friendship. We cannot have many intimate friends in life, but even a few friends can make life worth while when otherwise the journey would become routine, and we would lose interest in it. A friend does not have to say much, or he does not have to do much. He must be there at those times when we need the encouragement of somebody's presence or maybe at the time when we are strongly tempted to turn our backs on what we know is right. At such times a friend may merely put his hand on our shoulder and we cannot let him down.

It certainly will be in the work that a man or a woman does from day to day, because if we do not find deep and abiding satisfaction in the jobs that we are doing, we are bound to miss the meaning of life. We do not have any right to spend hours every day working at something we hate, if it is possible for us to provide for our economic needs in any other honorably fashion.

Surely we are not nearly so grateful for love as we ought to be, for it touches the depths of our being and causes us to know that there are tremendous possibilities before us, after we have read them clearly in the eyes of the beloved. Love has a magic power to transform us into the kind of persons we ought to be and to make the journey of life a joy with a song in our hearts.

We should take each day as a point of departure from which to begin a new journey, a new adventure along life's road. Only thus can we find the meaning of life in all of its richness and fullness.

Life was a journey for the Lord Jesus. His mission is not completed. He has entrusted it to His followers. He has assured us, who know, love and serve Him, that the Holy Spirit will lead us down life's pathway and that we can be effective witnesses for Him throughout the journey.

Strickland Gillilan, in one of his poems, said: "God kept on talking when His book had gone to press." As we travel down life's road the living God goes along with us. Life is a journey with tremendous possibilities for good for ourselves and for everyone whom our lives touch, or for evil for every person with whom we make contact. And it should be our purpose to live life in such a way that all the possibilities that God has wrapped up in the life of one single human being will have a chance to be developed and expressed.

Nothing can ever defeat a man who looks on life as a journey, who trusts and obeys God, and who continues to face forward. Such a one knows that by His side walks the Lord Who will supply His needs and bless him in a wonderful way.