

THE LIFE THAT COUNTS

"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).

The Word of God does not record a man's biography in either bitter execration or fulsome eulogy. Of the meanest man whose name appears in the New Testament the Bible simply says, "He went to his own place." Of the most spiritual man who moved beside the Son of God as He moved among the thronging crowds the Bible calls him "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

The figure of David is one of the most commanding and important in all Old Testament history. He had a career as a shepherd, poet, warrior, and king. He knew nature with its deep forests and wild beasts, its thunderstorms and running brooks, its wild flowers and mountain fastnesses, and its green meadows. He knew the city with its frowning battlements and shadowed streets, its foul odors, and its foul wickedness. He was a very sinful man, even to the extent of committing adultery and murder; yet he was also a religious man after God's own heart.

David was perhaps the most brilliant and forceful character in the public history of Israel. In this brief biography of him, which also constitutes his epitaph, no time is wasted over details. We are introduced at once to the purpose, the method, and the spirit of the man in this verse which reveals the secret of his great career. This text is of more than historical interest. It embalms a memory, and it also indicates an ideal. It presents life and death in their higher aspects.

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 that any person can make to his generation is the gift of a well-rounded and faithful Christian life.

Concerning "The Life That Counts" certain self-evident truths are set forth in our text.

I. Its Reality.

There is nothing so lovely as right living, and nothing so difficult. The business of life is service. The supreme test of life is service. Christ said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He also said, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." What our world needs is Christian 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 elevates and enables one to achieve in service.

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 William Howard 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 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 one, two, or five talents, is wholehearted 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 widely 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.

Service is the true object of life because Christ has commanded it. His last standing commission to those who constitute His churches is "Go ye, and make disciples of all the nations." He who makes Christian service the object of his life has the right to expect Christ's presence. How often we turn to His promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!" However we can claim that promise only as we comply with its condition. The condition is, "Go ye." Our example in service is Christ Who said, "I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give my life a ransom for many." His mission was to seek and to save that which was lost. This should be the object of our lives, namely, to witness to the unsaved. A life of Christian service blesses him who serves and those who are served.

II. Its Range.

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 the generation of our grandparents, but we can serve our own generation. Through serving our generation aright the generation in which our children shall live may be better than our own. We are not to serve our generation by dropping into its habits and customs, or by yielding to its notions and ideas which are contrary to the Word and will of God.

How did David serve his generation? First, in the capacity of a shepherd. As a brave and healthy boy, with a leather sling at his waist, and a shepherd's staff in his hand, he was as happy, useful, and contented as the day was long. What the world wanted from David just then was that he be a good shepherd. Second, in the capacity of a singer. When the moody madness was upon the king, David's harp could work wonders. There is no brighter, sweeter service than that of those who bring music into life and chase away sadness. Third, David served his generation in the capacity of a sovereign. Girt with the power of authority and gifted with all the

resources of genius, and housed amid the wealth and luxury incident to his regal station, David served his generation. The obligation of service expands with the increase of our opportunities; and where much is given much is required.

What is it to serve our generation? It is to perform the common duties of life, as David did. David was the son of a farmer and sheep-owner, and he took first of all to the keeping of the sheep. Many young men do not like to do the common work of their own father's business. You may say that you do not want to be a drudge, but that you want to be a king. Well, there are not many openings in that line of business. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Do the commonplace things, the ordinary things that come in your way, and you will begin to serve your generation.

Serving your generation means to be ready for the occasion when it comes. By diligence in duty, prepare for whatever may be your future opportunity, waiting patiently until it comes. Look at David's occasion of becoming famous. He never sought fame. He did not go up and down among his sheep, sighing and crying, "Oh, that I could get away from the dull business of looking after these flocks! My brothers have gone to the camp; they will get on as soldiers; but here I am, buried among these rocks, to look after these poor beasts." David was wiser than that; he quietly waited God's time. That is always a wise thing to do. If you are to serve God, wait until He calls you to His work; He will know where to find you when He wants you; you need not advertise yourself to His omniscience.

At length the set time came for David. On a certain day, his father told him to go to his brethren, and take them some corn and some loaves, with cheese for their captain; and he reached the camp just at the time when the giant Goliath was stalking forth, and defying all the armies of Israel to meet him. That was David's time, and he was ready for it. If he had lost that opportunity he might have remained a shepherd all the rest of his days. He slew both the lion and the bear, said he to Saul, and then prophesied that the uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he had defied the armies of the living God. Disdaining Saul's armour, he took his sling, and his five smooth stones out of the brook, and soon he came back with the gory head of the giant in his hand. If you want to serve the Lord through the church in your generation, be ready when the occasion comes.

To serve our own generation is not a single action, done at once, and over forever; it is to continue to serve to the end of life. David began to serve God, and he kept on serving Him. It is easy to sigh wistfully over the past, and to dream sentimentally about the future, and thus to allow the present hour to go by unimproved and returnless. What parts of our generation can we serve?

1. The part that is setting.

Some are like the sun going down in the west; soon they will be gone. Comfort, strengthen, and help them all you can. Look at their grey hairs as a crown of glory; make their descent to the grave as easy as you can. Cheer them all you can; learn from their experience, and ask God to be with you in your old age, as He is with them.

2. The part that is shining.

Those in middle life are like the sun at its zenith. Help them all you can.

3. The part that is rising.

Young people are like the sun in the east, as yet scarcely above the horizon. They are the most impressionable. Those who are saved when they are children usually make the best Christians.

The life of every person ought to be profitable to his or her contemporaries. Our own generation has immediate claims upon us. The dead are not touched by our influences or moved by our activities. So far as the living are concerned, there are prayers to be offered, in their behalf, 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. Our generation is the only one we can serve directly, and it is the will of God for us that we should do so correctly.

III. Its Rule.

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

1. Selfishness.

This is the lowest of all motives, and it always ruins. Selfishness in any 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 motives. But it is not sufficiently strong for the weighted burden and fiery tests of life.

3. The will of God.

This is the crowning and only adequate motive for life. For everyone who ignores the will of God life will be a losing battle. For everyone who obeys the will of God life will be a triumphant battle.

"He always wins who sides with God.
To him no cause is lost."

God has a plan for every one of our lives. We have just one chance at the earthly life, and 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 apart from the will of God, and it is His will that we shall serve our generation by manfully resisting the evils that afflict it, by being our very best in it, and by witnessing for the Lord in it.

IV. Its Reward.

"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, could exempt David 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." That is sweet language indeed. It ought to be remembered though that David did not go to sleep until his work was done. David's 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 to open them again on the resurrection day.

David's reward was twofold. It was both human and divine. Men honored him and 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. "Added unto his fathers" is an expression that recognizes the existence of the soul in a future state. "And he saw corruption" refers to the dissolution of his body.

What a blessed thing to close a career by resting after labor! 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.