

WHEN A DOOR CLOSES

"After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas." Acts 16:7-8.

We are always coming up to closed doors, and we are always asking "Why?" Life is full of efforts and failures. We start out for some desired goal, and things seem to be going well with us and our efforts, but one day we arrive at a point beyond which we cannot pass. We stand and look at an achievement which we cannot attain. Beneath what we are we often feel what we ought to be. As Mr. James M. Barrie said, "The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story and writes another, and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it." Life is full of withheld completions.

Are we wrong in constantly seeking for the completion of our dreams and visions and ideas? We are wrong in worrying over them, but we are not wrong in striving to achieve them.

Disappointment is the common lot of man. Prince and peasant, prophet and people, wise and unwise, rich and poor, young and old experience disappointment. The person does not live who, at some time or other, has not been disappointed. So, when disappointment comes to you, you should realize that what has happened to you is but the common lot of all mankind.

The number of disappointments are incalculable. Think of the millions on record all along the stream of time; think of the many millions more that are never placed on record. The variety of disappointments which men suffer is very great. Men are disappointed in carrying out schemes of ambition, in securing preferment, in amassing and holding wealth; yes, even in carrying out plans for the benefit of others. The sources of disappointments are numerous. We are constantly taken by surprise at things springing up that we never dreamed of and for which we are unprepared.

The bitterness and melancholy results of these disappointments are worthy of note. Many a bright and happy life has been forever clouded and depressed by early disappointment. Many a life has been shortened because of some overpowering disappointment.

So, let us consider a factual personal problem which is practically universal in its application. It is the fact that very few persons have a chance to live their lives on the basis of a first choice. All of us have to live upon the basis of our second and third choices. To one who reads biography this comes to be so much a matter of course that he takes it for granted.

Moses cherished the fond anticipation of entering Canaan, but his hopes were crashed on the very borderland.

David dreamed of a temple for God. He planned it and gathered materials for it, but one day God intervened and closed the door which prevented him from building it.

Many times Paul planned a course which he was not permitted to follow. Once he was going to Damascus to imprison Christians, but he became a Christian himself. Later he wanted very much to go into Bithynia, one of the richest provinces in Asia Minor, but that door was closed to him, and he landed in Troas. God turned Paul back from Asia because He wanted him in Europe.

I can picture him standing on the shores of the Aegean, and saying, "I wanted to go to Bithynia and here I am in Troas." But lo! through Troas a way opened to the preeminent service of his entire career. He rendered the most significant service with the leftovers of a broken plan. Wanting Bithynia and getting Troas, how familiar an experience that is! But to take Troas, the disappointment, the broken plan, the leftover of a disappointed expectation, and make of it the greatest opportunity we ever had, how much less familiar that is! Yet, as one reads the story of human life, one sees that powerful living has always involved such a victory as Paul won in Troas over his own soul and his situation.

Have you ever wanted one thing and gotten another? We watch our young people grow up, as we did, with their ambitions and plans for Bithynia and we wonder what they will do when they face the inescapable experience. When they are shut out from their first choice and get the second or third one, will they know how to handle that? Will they have the spirit and attitude and technique to make of it their finest chance?

What was in Paul that enabled him to turn defeat into victory? One thing was his genuine Christianity. Whatever else was shaken when Paul got to Troas, his conviction still was there that God had a plan for his life, a pattern for his character, an ideal for his soul, and that if God had led him to Troas there must be something there worth discovering, that God's purpose included Troas just as much as Bithynia, and that God never leads any person into any place where all the doors are shut.

It is just in such situations as this that one can tell how much real Christianity a person has. When you see one who wants Bithynia and gets Troas, and then remains certain that there is a purpose for his life, and takes a positive attitude toward the second-best, you know that his religion is effective.

Another thing that enabled Paul to turn defeat into victory was his concern for other people. The trouble with many of us is that when we get disappointed we begin to pity ourselves. We often engage in wild imaginings about what we would have done if things had just turned out as we had planned and expected. Paul could have done that.

He could have said, "If my plans had not been broken; if I had not given up everything for Jesus Christ, I could have been one of the greatest rabbis of Jerusalem." How easy it would have been for him to have felt sorry for himself in his disappointment.

Instead, he at once began thinking about other people. He wondered if there was not some one who might be better off because he had landed in Troas. He had not been there one night before he saw a man from Macedonia and heard him saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." It was Paul's unselfishness, his generosity, his magnanimity that opened the doors for him in Troas.

Most of us are familiar enough with life's closed doors. There are few lives in which the voyage has been all plain sailing, and those whose way has been unchequered by trouble have generally not got very far in the end, or become very much in the process. Most of us know something of broken plans, ambitions frustrated, promising doors closed just when we were about to go through. Perhaps it was ill-health, or just misfortune, or some unaccountable turn of events that put an end to our hopes. Perhaps we are looking at some such closed door and asking, Where do we go from here?

The point to make clear to ourselves is that there are no dead-ends if we are seeking the purpose of God. When a door closes God opens another. It may be a different door leading to a new experience, but it is always there if we will look for it. Some have found what proved to be their greatest work in life through an initial failure.

When we think of William Carey, we recall that he had Polynesia on his heart and longed to take the gospel there, but God chose India for him.

David Livingstone had his mind and heart set on China. But the door to China was closed by the Opium War, and God opened the door to Africa for him. There he made his name and left the mark of Christ on its heart forever.

When Adoniram Judson was a young man he gave himself to missionary service and his ambition centered on India. That was his Bithynia. When at last he reached India they would not admit him. The East India Company would not allow him to stay and the governor told him to take the first ship back to America. For a year he labored to open the doors of India, but they were bolted. So he turned to Burma. That was his Troas, unknown, untouched Burma. Can one suppose that through all of that disappointment Judson could see the leading of God? Of course not, because he was human. But he did so handle the affair in Burma that the doors began to open until today no informed person can think of Burma without thinking of Judson. When the consequence began to appear and Judson looked upon his life in retrospect he could see that it had been planned of God.

When we think of Phillips Brooks, we think of spiritual ministry, a great personality pouring his soul out with abundant power upon the people. Of all the letters that he received, it is said that he cherished most this one from a small tailor shop near Copley Square in Boston: "Dear Mr. Brooks: I am a tailor in a little shop near your church. Whenever I have the opportunity I always go to hear you preach. Each time I hear you preach I

seen to forget all about you, for you make me think of God." Nevertheless, remember that Phillips Brooks did not plan to be a preacher. He planned to be a teacher. That was his Bithynia. As soon as he graduated from college he plunged into his chosen profession of teaching and he failed. He failed completely. Listen to what he wrote about his pupils as he was failing: "They are the most disagreeable set of creatures without exception that I have ever met." After he had failed and had been dropped from his position, he wrote, "I don't know what will become of me and I don't care much"; "I shall not study a profession." There is a sense in which Brooks never recovered from the disappointment. At the flower of his career he came down once from the office of President Eliot of Harvard white as a sheet and fairly trembling because he had declined what he knew to be his last opportunity to become a teacher. He wanted Bithynia and he got Troas but through Troas he found the door into a service that if he had lived a hundred lives he might never have found again.

The kind of service we longed to do may be beyond our reach, but love can find other channels where God needs our service just as much. It may be less congenial or outwardly less important. But the service of God is a region where our human measurements do not apply. The meaning of a closed door may mean that God wants us somewhere else. God needs our service and He knows best where He wants us to be. Love is a plant that can grow in any soil, and the place that may need it most may be the place we might not choose.

If a door closes to you, it will be disappointing, but do not decide that you are defeated. Profit by the wonderful example of Paul in a similar situation. As soon as he landed in Troas, although he was disappointed, he immediately saw an open door, a beckoning man, a new opportunity and a successful ministry. He simply mastered his disappointment and changed it into an opportunity for service. He made the very best of his situation and rendered the greatest service possible for his Lord.