

"LIVING A DAY AT A TIME"

"And as thy days, so shall thy strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25.

Life is so stressful, so crowded with battle and burden and work that we need all along to fortify ourselves with the promises from God's Word. We need to plead His promises when we pray. They are designed to rest and fortify and inspire us. We do not make enough of them. They fit every condition in human life. There is no condition that is not met by a promise out of God's Book. These promises give us a grip on spiritual realities. Search them out, appropriate them, make them your own, and plead them before Him.

Whose is the promise? It is the promise that God makes to His friends. Since it is His promise, that pledge is well-grounded. Human promises are often frail and easily broken. These words remind us of a picture drawn by Mrs. Stowe, in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' of a slave weary and worn with toiling in the sultry sun. One quotes the words, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" The reply was, "Them's good words, but who says 'em?" Obviously all depends on that. So it is here. The words are said by one who knows what our days will be, who orders our days, who measures our days, who has an unchangeable love for us and infinite resources on which we can draw throughout the days, and whose love as revealed in Christ is a pledge that He will be with us to the end of the days.

Our text is taken from the swan song of Moses. They are a sincere effort to counsel and encourage the children of Israel for the tasks which lie before them. Who does not feel that these words have a vitality and freshness altogether their own, and a wealth of inspiration independent of the man who first uttered them, and of the historic people who first heard them? They are as living as if they were spoken to us individually by the voice of God. Brief as a proverb, they are as full of meaning as the Bible is of God. Old as the everlasting hills, they refresh us like the breath of a spring morning.

Many are overwrought, tense, distracted, and anxious because they have never mastered the art of living one day at a time. Physically we do live a day at a time. But mentally we live in all three tenses at once, past, present, and future. People crack up, not because the strains and problems of life are too great, but because they are carrying a triple load. Along with today's burdens, they are lugging about the burdens of the past and of the future. And "the load of tomorrow, added to that of yesterday, carried today, makes the strongest falter."

To live a day at a time means to stop living in the past. Many of us have never learned how to forget "those things which are behind." It is such a temptation for us to use up our powers living over the past, and regretting old mistakes, short-comings, and decisions, and when we do, we have so little strength left to grapple with the insistent problems and tasks immediately before us. Mulling over the mistakes of yesterday paralyzes the efforts of today. Excessive regret over the blunders of the past freezes our energies, and wholly unfits us for radiant and effective living in the present.

Some of us need to give ourselves a good talking-to along this line, and say quite bluntly to ourselves, "The past is gone -- utterly and irretrievably gone." It is now completely beyond your control. Not all the tears and regrets on earth can change the slightest part of it. Then stop this useless worry about the past, and muster all your strength for handling the future.

In the closing scene of Shakespeare's THE TEMPEST, Prospero says to Alonzo: "Let us not burden our remembrances with a heaviness that's gone." That is excellent advice, and increasingly we must learn to follow it. Let us commit our mismanaged past into the hands of God.

Living a day at a time means that we must stop living in the future. Jesus taught that we are not to be anxious and burdened and fearful about tomorrow -- that we are not to expend our resources of body, mind, and spirit bearing tomorrow's burdens in advance, and solving tomorrow's problems before they happen. Our Lord spoke of the terrible habit of anticipating troubles and tragedies, most of which actually never take place. Some are never at our best simply because we do not concentrate on the task or the problem immediately before us. Our hands are busy with the present, but our minds are off tackling some situation which does not yet exist.

All of life is organized on this principle of a day at a time. Victory in anything hangs upon a series of victories which we must win one by one. A book is read one page at a time. An education is gotten one lesson at a time. And so, if you would succeed in life, do not try to live your whole life all at once. Live one day at a time, and live it well. Put all you have into each day's opportunities and duties, and life will take care of itself.

Notice carefully how the promise runs. Not as our life is, not as our years are, not even as our weeks are, but as our days, so shall our strength be. For each day as it comes, God's promise is that strength will be given us, but just for a day at a time. The way to live under any circumstances is just a day at a time. Leave tomorrow with God until it comes. That is what the Word of God lays upon us as a duty. Let us live this day at our bravest and best, trusting that God's help will not fail us. No strength is given today for tomorrow; tomorrow will bring the strength for the day, and the day after will bring the strength for that day. However hard and heavy the duties and trials of tomorrow strength will be given us when the day comes.

Like Livingstone, we pillow our heads on the old saying: Leave tomorrow's trouble to tomorrow's strength; tomorrow's work to tomorrow's time; tomorrow's trial to tomorrow's grace and tomorrow's God. He assures us that for every day and every hour and every moment His strength shall be available for our weakness.

Walt Whitman has a great word in his eulogy of General Grant. He describes him as 'a man of mighty days, and equal to the days.' The word is just a transcript of the Divine promise. We are always purposed by our God to be more than a match for the largest circumstances, more than level with the vastest opportunity, more than adequate to the most exacting task. Mighty days are therefore days of royal privilege because they are days of promised power and endowment.

After all, God promises strength and wisdom and endurance only for today. He promises grace for each contest as it comes; never for the entire season's schedule. "And as thy days, so shall thy strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25. Each day we are given spiritual manna sufficient for that particular day's needs; nothing more and nothing less.

"Lord, for tomorrow and its needs, I do not pray;
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin, just for today.
Let me both diligently work, and duly pray;
Let me be kind in word and deed, just for today.

Let me be slow to do my will, prompt to obey;
Oh, keep me in Thy loving care, just for today.
Let me no wrong or idle word, unthinking say;
Set Thou a seal upon my lips, just for today.

Let me in season, Lord, be grave, in season, gay;
Let me be faithful to Thy grace, just for today.
So, for tomorrow and its needs I do not pray;
But keep me, guide me, love me, Lord, just for today."

God does not ask us to trust Him for a whole year in one supreme act of faith. He asks us to trust Him for a day, a span which is surely within the compass of our resources. This promise suggests God's individual care for His people. He takes each one separately and weighs their needs for the day, and supplies sufficient power to meet those needs.

In all the intervening centuries, these simple words have inspired the souls of the children of God. As long as the world stands, they will infuse courage into those who are fighting the good fight of faith. And today they speak to us; speak of power to do all, of intrepidity to brave all, of patience to suffer all, of fortitude to sacrifice all, and of faith to conquer all.

Let me make three suggestions that should help you in your endeavor to live a day at a time.

1. Tomorrow may never come.

For some of us the day we've worried about may never arrive. None of us relish or cherish the thought, but if we are to be realistic we must face it. The future you're so anxious about may never come. So why waste today's strength handling a tomorrow which may never arrive?

2. If tomorrow does come, its character may be altogether different from what you anticipate.

Frankly, it may be much less unhappy than you think. Dr. Gordon Gilkey tells the following story: One morning in May, 1944, a young woman in New England was thinking apprehensively about her husband. He was a Captain in the Army, and for nearly two years he had been stationed in far-off Iran. His job there was to supervise the transportation of war supplies from a port in the Persian Gulf to a distributing point in southern Russia. At first his letters home had arrived regularly, but now many weeks had passed without bringing word from him. Finally the strain was too much for his wife, and she gave way to great anxiety. Had something serious happened? Would she never see her husband again? What if he were already dead? Suddenly the telephone rang, and this young woman heard the faint words, "Long distance calling." A moment later a well-known voice came over the wire. The captain himself was speaking, and what he said was almost incredible. "They gave me a month's leave and the chance to fly home. I left the Persian Gulf day before yesterday, and reached New York in forty-seven hours. I'll be home on the 3:40 train.....and please be at the station."

So, problems and defeats and sorrows which you expect to meet tomorrow may never come. You may get joys and victories instead.

"Perhaps the dreaded future
Has less bitter than I think;
The Lord may sweeten the waters
Before I stoop to drink."

Three sad and disheartened women went that Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus. On the way they said among themselves, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" But all this concern was wasted, for when they arrived, "they saw that the stone was rolled away." You see, the future was different from what these women imagined it would be. They never actually had to face the situation they worried about. As one elderly Christian testified, "I'm an old woman, and I've had lots of troubles, most of which never happened."

"Some of your griefs you have cured,
And the worst you have always survived;
But what agonies you have endured
From the troubles that never arrived!"

3. Whatever the character of tomorrow, God is adequate.

This implies that strength will be needed. Strength will be needed to live our lives aright. It will be needed for the practical tasks; for the mysteries of suffering; and to avoid being engulfed in despair.

This precious promise implies that strength will be given. How blessed and comforting to know that we have a Helper who knows our needs and has the power to satisfy them. A third inspiring implication is that the strength which our Heavenly Father gives us will be graduated according to our daily needs. God deals with us on the day by day and hour by hour plan. His blessings shall be given to us day by day.

The future may be more bitter than we think, but whatever it holds for us, His grace is altogether sufficient. He will supply every need and see us safely through. Then in simple faith and surest trust let us commit the whole of our uncertain future to God. Let us leave it with Him. Let us trust it to His power and grace. God is never baffled. In His company you need not fear the happenings of an unknown future.

"I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies."

In A MINISTRY OF SONG, Frances Ridley Havergal wrote a poem entitled, "Daily Strength," which I pass on to you for its worth and helpfulness.

"As thy days, thy strength shall be!"
This should be enough for thee;
He who knows thy frame will spare
Burdens more than thou canst bear.

When thy days are veiled in night,
Christ shall give thee heavenly light;
Seem they wearisome and long,
Yet in Him thou shalt be strong.

Cold and wintry though they prove,
Thine the sunshine of His love;
Or, with fervid heat oppressed,
In His shadow thou shalt rest.

When thy days on earth are past,
Christ shall call thee home at last,
His redeeming love to praise,
Who hath strengthened all thy days.