

BEAUTIFUL FAILURES

"And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink." Exodus 2:3

The history of this world reveals a series of failures that form the steps in the world's progress. Learning to walk is a series of falls. A child first falls, then learns to catch himself as he falls, and thus takes a step. The fertility of the great river valleys is due to the lack of fertility of the hill country near the river.

In our text we have the description of a beautiful failure. Pharaoh had said it, and it must be so. All male babies of the Hebrews must be slain. They were multiplying too swiftly. While the edict was being carried into effect, a beautiful boy baby was born to slave parents in the land of Goshen. These parents were of moderate social position, strong parental affection, and good religious character.

"What shall we do with him?" was a question often on their lips. "Hide him," was the only reply. This was done for a few weeks, but every day brought new fears and anxieties. The rising sun, the shining stars, and the neighbors who smiled a knowing smile, all seemed to say, "You have failed." One evening a bent slave-father entered a humble home with an alarmed countenance, for he had heard his babe's voice from a distance on his way from work. That night was a sleepless night in the cabin. A bright girl cried nearly all night, a troubled father walked the floor and a broken-hearted mother held their beautiful boy baby closer to her bosom. Next morning the son left the home. That is always a sad experience. In this case, it was very sad, for the son was only three months old. He was left in a boat launched by his parents, who were conscious of failure. Ships have sailed many waters since, but no other ship every meant as much to the coming generation. The boat was sent out from the harbor of parental failure, and lined with a mother's love. It floated on the tides of the providences of God. It was part of His eternal plan, and while it signified failure on the one hand, it was a beautiful failure. Looking at this passage we can see how failures become beautiful. Failures are beautiful when: —

I. They Are Discoveries of the Plan of God.

God works by a plan, whether He is making a leaf, a feather, a tree, a universe, or life. Failures are often as necessary to the discovery of His plan as successes are. As we look back we can see the greatest thing Moses' parents did was to fail in their effort to keep him hidden. This is true because it helped to discover God's great plan.

Paul slept at Troas because he had failed to go to the northeast on a missionary tour. The Spirit of God caused him to fail to go. Thinking of failure, he fell asleep and dreamed he saw a man from Macedonia calling for help. As he carried out his dream, the gospel was first preached in Europe, because a man failed.

Joseph's life was a series of failures. He failed to get along with his brothers in the home. He failed to get back home when he went to see them in the fields. He failed to make a good impression on Potiphar. He failed to get out of prison after two years after he had befriended the butler. And yet, all these failures are beautiful because they helped him to discover God's plan for the world.

Israel failed in Egypt, and her sons were made slaves. The health of Lazarus failed, and he died. Luther failed and was thrown into prison. Bunyan failed and was jailed. Paul failed and was imprisoned. But all these failures are beautiful, because they helped to discover God's plans. Judson first planned to enter India as a missionary. The Governor of the East India Company ordered him out and advised him to return to America. He obeyed the order but he did not take the advice. Instead, he went to Burma and there he laid the foundation of a great missionary field.

II. A Life of Continuous Success Does Not Reveal One's Real Self to Any Man.

If Moses' parents had not failed, the world never would have known of Moses. Just as the chemical on the photograph paper brings out the picture, so failures in life bring out the weak and the strong points that are there. Peter had to fail to walk on the water before he appreciated his weakness and Christ's strength. Goldsmith had to fail to have any money to pay his board before Johnson searched through his papers and found his manuscript of the "Vicar of Wakefield." Poe's poverty was a "spur to prick the sides of his intention" and drive him to labor. Whistler, the great artist, who painted the picture so often seen on Mother's Day, planned to be a soldier. He went to West Point, and failed in chemistry. He remarked that if silicon had been a gas, he would have been a Major General. Phillips Brooks planned to be a teacher. He was a poor disciplinarian, and after having failed as a teacher he was greatly depressed, and refused to see anyone. Later he turned his attention to the ministry and became one of the greatest ministers of all time. Sir Walter Scott wanted to be a poet. Upon his failure as such, he turned his attention to fiction. He was so humbled by his failure that he wrote his first novel anonymously. And yet, he became England's greatest novelist. Lincoln failed as a country storekeeper; but suppose he had succeeded. Many great things about his marvelous character would have remained undiscovered.

III. They Develop Sympathy in Us.

If continuous success crowns our efforts, we become unsympathetic and unsymmetrical in character. "All sunshine makes a desert" is an old Arab proverb. An occasional failure makes a Washington. An uninterrupted success makes a Napoleon. In the great peach orchards, they pull green peaches from the trees in order to have, not fewer peaches, but bigger and better peaches. So our lives are sweetened and enlarged by having some things taken from us. "Character is the fine art of giving up." The spark is brought from the flint by friction. So the spark of sympathy is struck from the life of Milton, George Matheson, and others by the failure of eyesight.

IV. They Are Stepping-Stones to Higher Things.

Had the parents of Moses succeeded in hiding him, what would have been the result? Only another slave boy to grow to manhood and perish under the taskmaster's lash. But failure meant the opening of a gate to a higher life. The world's great possessions are purchased at the price of failure. We have automobiles, because horses failed to travel fast enough. We have electric lights because tallow candles failed to give enough illumination. We have telephones because the human voice failed to carry far enough. We have victrola records because the human voice failed to speak after death. Our language is the monument to thousands of failures, for every time present words fail to express the shade of meaning intended other words have been coined until our language has been built like a house a little at a time.

V. They Bring Us to God.

If you should ask Jairus what one asset he ever possessed that in later life he valued most highly, I expect he would say it was the failure of his daughter's health and her death, for these things, so sad at the time, brought the Master into his home. Anything is beautiful that brings us to God and enables us to see Him.