

"WHAT GOOD IS LIFE TO ME?"

"And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" (Genesis 27:46).

Doubtless Rebekah, as a mother, promised herself much joy in her children. When they grew up Esau became wayward and Jacob became a wanderer. Rebekah yielded to favoritism and schemed to carry her point. Unfortunate indeed is any person who has to be associated with a schemer. Rebekah cherished a treacherous spirit and caused Jacob to sin. She was not ambitious for herself, but extremely so for Jacob. She was careless about results, but when they came she found them bitter. She loved Jacob more than God. Consequently, it is not surprising that she exclaimed, "What good shall my life do me?"

Rebekah's question, which she raised in the late evening of her life's long day, is your question and mine today. This personal and probing question should cause us to think seriously about life, about its stern realities as well as its brevity. Frequently we hear the question, Is life worth living? While this question may seem needless, it occupies the minds of many. Evidently, multitudes think that life is not worth living. Those who commit suicide, many prisoners, many of those who suffer, numerous inmates of the alms houses, and others in various walks of life, who do not know Christ as their Saviour, say that life is not worth living. There is no hesitation on the part of those who are Christians in saying that life is worth living. They have come into possession of true satisfaction in and through Christ.

Frankly, life is not worth living to the man whose only ambition is to carve out a career, to make a fortune, to become a power for himself, and to live only for time. Life is a gruesome mockery to those who pursue the sensuous delights and think only of a so-called good time in the present.

We are encouraged by the progress toward an appreciation of life in various areas. Back in the dim and distant past, certain philosophers closeted themselves in dingy rooms and falsely declared that "man is a victim crying in the night, with no language but a cry." With such a low concept, life meant little more than a lingering period of whining and wailing and waiting for the demons of despair to hold high carnival with souls in the fast-gathering gloom.

Thank God, we have passed that day. We remember that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Looking about us to behold the marvels of the mastery of man in the material universe, we are ready to reject the verdict of the past, that man is a victim, and proclaim him victor, in the name and for the glory of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Then, there was a day, not so distant, when man was regarded as a mere fighter, and his chief business in life was that of fighting. We are making progress. We waded through blood during World War I to learn that man's main business in life is not to make and manipulate machine guns. It was a lesson paid for by blood and tears. It was encouraging when the people of France, some years ago, were called upon to express their judgment in a popular vote as to the greatest Frenchman in history. Nine

million cast their votes, and as the ballots were being counted the world waited for the verdict. Many predicted that the honor would go to Napoleon, who was remembered by the lives he had destroyed. But, to the credit of the common people of France, the honor was given to Pasteur, who was, and is, remembered by the lives he had helped to save.

In considering the significance of life, we pass to another period when man was thought of as a producer, and the chief end of existence and effort was that of material production. If we are wise, we will "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Man is endowed with a genius and capacity for material production, but he is more than a mere producer of material wealth. Therefore, we cannot measure life with a calendar. Nor can we determine man's real value by a report from Dunn and Bradstreet.

There are some who would have us hark back to the false philosophy of the dim past and regard man as a thinker, whose first business in life is to think and express and preserve his thoughts for future generations. They tell us that "Knowledge is power," "Wisdom is the main thing" and "The world belongs to the man who knows." But, the truth is that man can no more "think" himself out of the bondage of sin than he can think himself through a stone wall. There is no process of thinking that can put us "in Christ."

"What good shall my life do me?" If I am no more than a victim with a whine, a fighter with a sword, a producer with a product, or a thinker with a book, then life isn't worth the time it takes to get to the grave.

Someone has said, "There is a cross and a throne in every heart. The cross is to crucify self on and the throne is to enthrone Christ on." But, alas! alas! too many of us have revised the order and have crucified Christ and enthroned self.

I should like to pass on to you three of the greatest maxims in the philosophy of life:

1. "Know thyself."

This maxim was given by Socrates, the Greek philosopher, who discoursed for a lifetime upon this one theme, whether he talked to bakers or bankers, peddlers or poets, politicians or preachers.

2. "Control thyself."

This was given by Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman soldier. To him the mastery of self was the first duty of man, and he molded the military force of Rome with his maxim. History tells the tragic story of many men who control armies on the battlefield, but who went down to ruin and the grave because they failed to control themselves. We have harnessed the rivers of the earth and the electricity of the heavens to the chariot of convenience and commerce, and have achieved marvels in space, and yet we have failed in the mastery of self.

3. "Deny thyself."

Christ said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The Master asserted that the pre-eminent law of Christianity is that of self-denial.

What good is life to me? If it is to do the good that God intended for it to do, it will be characterized by:

I. A Pardon For Sin.

With the burden of sin and its attendant guilt upon the soul and conscience, there cannot be any satisfaction. Isaiah sounded the secret when he wrote, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

No plan of living can be satisfying that does not deal effectively, squarely, and sanely with the sin problem. Sin is a burning reality. All of us have to face its awful presence and results. Many hold a careless attitude and sow wild oats with a reckless freedom. Even the Bible recognizes that there are pleasures connected with sin. It says, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Such pleasures are only "for a season." Life isn't worth living for those who continually spurn the proffers of divine grace. The greatest possible sin that one can commit is the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Judas Iscariot committed suicide he went to his own place. There is no use minimizing the teaching about hell. Christ never minced matters when He dealt with this subject, unpleasant as it must have been to Him. He spoke of it as a place of torment and of eternal duration. He made it clear that the door into hell opened only one way.

Christ alone satisfies. In His finished work upon the cross, where His blood was shed for sinners, is to be found freedom from the condemning power of the law, the controlling power of sin, and the conquering power of death.

II. A Plan Of Production.

Many have built air castles and indulged in imaginative schemes of ease and pleasure. They have thought that real life is one round of luxury, but God's Word does not hold out any such scheme. God has devised a plan of work for all. He has said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:19). In I Thessalonians 3:10 we read, "That if any would not work, neither should he eat." No one has ever been ordained to be a consumer, but he has been created by God to be a producer. God would make every life an asset rather than a liability. It is utterly foolish to think that the world owes every man a living. Every man owes the world a life of work and service. The truly great always recognize the dignity of labor. God has honored labor from the beginning. It is not God's will that men should take more out of the storehouse of civilization than they have put into it.

III. A Program Of Service.

Of a king of old it was written, "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 first and finest of all Christian ethics is to think of and serve others. In Mark 10:45 we read, "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." God had a definite purpose in saving us and that purpose is bound up in seeking to touch others for Him. We are to be more in God's service than seat warmers.

The greatest joy in the Christian life is found in service for God. The finest epitaph any man could desire is the memorial inscription to General Gordon in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

I was greatly impressed as I stood there and read it. It says, "He gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, his heart to God." Such a life is worth living in the sight of both God and man. Moody declared that he would like to have carved on his tombstone the words, "A young man walking about the streets witnessing to Jesus Christ." God calls us to serve Him.

Life's true greatness is measured by service. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister" (Matthew 20:26). A historian would want at least a thousand words to tell the story of a great man. A philosopher would want five hundred words, and a poet not less than one hundred. But Christ, Who knew how to appraise character, gives all of these words back, and uses two simple and straightforward ones to tell the story of true greatness and genuine goodness. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

"What good shall my life do me?" That depends upon how much good it does others. If one squanders life on self, he is in a little business and bound for failure. If one pins all his hopes to personal gain here, life isn't worth the time it takes to get to the end.

IV. A Pledge Of Plenty.

A godly life cannot be defeated. It is hemmed in with the promises of God and backed by His power. Such a life looks further than it sees, and its reach is greater than its grasp. Trouble, sickness, pain, and sorrow may be heaven's challenge to cast ourselves back upon the resources of God and thus give Him a chance to manifest finer works than are seen in mountains and stars.

God's Word guarantees a divine supply for every need. It says, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). God does not promise to supply our wants and wishes. If He were to do this, we would soon discover that life is a burden and not a joy. If there is a need for wisdom, there is a promise to meet it. If the need is that of power, He is the One Who supplies it. Should it be a cry for grace and piety, He will gladly provide.

God holds before every one of His children the highest possible life and the greatest possible service. There may be times when we feel as though these things are impossible, and in our own strength they are. If a Christian is to live as he should, it will be only by a power beyond himself. But, it is well to remember that God never commands us to do anything without providing corresponding power

to make such possible. If we fail to live a worthy and satisfying life, let us not blame God for our failure because He is vitally interested in our success and usefulness. He waits to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20).