

THE URGENCY OF LIFE'S MISSION

We must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. -- John 9:4

Jesus and His disciples met a man who was born blind. He had never seen the light of day, nor the beauties of the world in which we live. The disciples said, "Lord, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Many of the Jews in the days of Jesus believed that if a man was unfortunate, somebody had committed a special sin and God was punishing him for this sin. They thought a righteous man would prosper in temporal affairs whereas a wicked man would be cursed, but Jesus repudiated the idea that we can tell what kind of a person a man is by the way that he prospers in temporal affairs. Sometimes suffering is punishment for sin, but it is not always so. Ofttimes the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Jesus gives us to understand here that suffering is not wholly penal, but is sometimes redemptive in purpose. This man was born blind that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

There is no place in this world for idlers. Men ought to work, not just to make a living but because there is so much that needs to be done. To the Pharisee, who challenged Jesus for healing the lame man on the Sabbath, He replied, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." John 5:17. God is the great worker of the universe. Paul said, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Philippians 2:13. There was in Jesus the supreme urge to work. According to Carlyle that is the mark of genius.

In this text, which is one of the most solemn statements that ever fell from His lips, our Lord sets before us four things: --

I. A Specific Duty.

"We must work."

What explains this urgency? He stood face to face with a man who needed help. Jesus never looked on such an unfortunate man without being moved to pity. So far as the record indicates, Jesus never met a blind man that He did not give him sight, nor a sick man whom He did not heal. Human need always stirred Him into activity, whether that need was physical, mental, or spiritual. And any man who can stand face to face with human need and not be moved by it is not related spiritually to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was conscious of an inward compulsion. He felt that necessity was laid upon Him. A feeling of "must" was always tugging at His heart, and moving Him to action. In this case He was possessed by a three-fold purpose and desire: to illustrate God's beneficence; to remove man's blindness; and to express His own compassion. Because He loved the sons of men so well, He could not sit still and see them perish. He could not come down from heaven and be an impassive, careless, loitering spectator of so much evil and misery.

Christ takes us into partnership with Him in the work of the Father. How He exalts us when He says: "We must work"! The consciousness that we are laborers together with Him will transfigure even the most monotonous round of our daily toil. Working with Him the common task can never appear entirely commonplace. No labor that we share with Him can not ever seem insignificant. The glow of privilege will always be on the path of duty. It is our privilege, our duty, our honor, and our glory to be co-workers with God in His field.

II. A Divine Mission.

"We must work the works of Him that sent Me."

Jesus was always conscious of having been sent by the Father -- an assurance that gave unity to His manifold activities. What the works were that He was sent to perform He

has clearly told us. In the synagogue at Nazareth, He declared that He was sent on a six-fold mission: to evangelize the poor; to heal the broken-hearted; to emancipate the captive; to restore sight to the blind; to liberate the bruised; and to proclaim the Lord's acceptable year.

As the Father equipped, commissioned, and sent Him, even so does He equip, commission, and send us to bear the same message, and to continue the same ministry of evangelizing, healing, emancipating, enlightening, and consoling.

When Jesus saw the blind man, not only was He moved with compassion for the man, but He also felt that God had sent Him to help just such people. This sense of a divine mission moved Him to help. He felt that God had placed Him in the world for that very purpose. To fail to help the blind man then would mean, not only to fail His fellowman; it would mean to fail God. The sense of a divine mission in life will sustain one when all else fails. Christ rightly described His work and ours as the work of God. We are obligated to do the works of Him who sent us which are:

1. The works of piety.

Trusting in God, submitting to Him, loving Him, serving Him, and rejoicing in Him. We must thank the Father for our creation, believe in the Son for our redemption, and harken to the Spirit for our sanctification.

2. The works of equity to our neighbors.

We are to work so as to wrong no one, but to help all.

3. The works of charity to the poor.

We must perform these works in obedience to God's command and in proportion to our means.

The duty is ours to perform, and the results are God's to give. What we do, we must do because God has assigned it, and because therein His character will be unfolded, His purpose will be proclaimed, His gospel will be adorned, and He will be glorified.

III. A Limited Opportunity.

"While it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

The shortness of our day is a truth which we all know, and all forget. To Jesus every day was trembling with destinities; every hour was pulsating with vital issues. Therefore, He seized every passing moment and filled it full of loving service.

We are co-workers with God. Too many try to do as little as possible in church work. They forget that work is Christlike and Godlike. When Christ calls us into His service He asks us to work with Him and for Him. Cooperation with Him and with His people is a needed lesson for us all. Each person has a great work given to him to do, and he is in great danger of not doing it. We are to do our work while it is day. What is meant by day? It means the present time, the time of life, and the time of grace. For example within the day of life there are days especially favorable, such as the days of youth, the days of health, the days of religious opportunity, and the days of spiritual influence.

In His interpretation of the day, Christ uses the language of urgency. One's mission must be fulfilled in the day of opportunity or not at all. Christ called His life-time a day in order to show us that He was impressed with the shortness of it. His life ended when most human life is said to begin. Time is long enough for the work, but too short to allow trifling. It is well for men to begin early.

One should perform his specific duty, in fulfillment of the divine mission, in the specific time because of the brevity and uncertainty of life. The day is short, the task is great, the reward is much, and the Master is urgent. Human existence may be compared with the most fleeting things in nature -- the mist which disappears before the sun, the cloud driven by the winds, the shadows that flit across the landscape, the smoke that ascends and mingles with the atmosphere, the leaf of the tree and the flower of the field. The time for the acquisition of knowledge, personal and spiritual growth, the development of grace, and the contraction of good habits is brief. Time and opportunity pass rapidly away. We cannot afford to throw our opportunities away. What we do in God's service must be done quickly. Life is brief and opportunities fleeting. What we do to help our fellowman and to glorify God must be done now. The day wanes, the night cometh, the opportunity passes, and eternity hastens.

Real life is reckoned "in deeds, not in years; in thoughts, not in breaths; in feelings, not in figures on a dial." Its value is measured by quality, not by length. Its pathos is misuse, not suffering. Its trials are achievements, not prolongation. It's a failure not when our dreams are unfulfilled, but when our work is undone.

IV. A Finished Task.

"When no man can work."

We must cease from our labors for Jesus said that the night is coming. The time for work will expire, and there is no possibility of performing any work thereafter. Nightfall ends many a toiler's work before it is finished. They carried Raphael into his studio, and as he took a last look at "The Transfiguration," the canvas on which he had made visible to mortal eyes a part of the divine essence, he cried, "Alas, it will never be completed!" Cecil Rhodes, whose strenuous life began with digging diamonds out of the Kimberly mines for himself and closed with trying to carve an empire out of Africa for his Queen, died with these words on his lips, "So much to do, so little done." Jesus, when the night came, said, "Father, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." If we will merge our lives with His, and unite with Him in working the works of God, He will help us to finish our appointed task.

"The night cometh, when no man can work." The night cometh for the pastor, who has labored for and with his flock; for the evangelist, who has preached with earnestness; for the Sunday School teacher, who has loved and taught his or her pupils; for the missionary, who has worked for souls; for the sitters in the pews; for the father, the mother, the son, the daughter, the husband, and the wife. The night cometh for you. Prepare for your meeting with God before the night cometh to you, or you will never have an opportunity to do so. Accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour now.