

OUR EARTHLY TASK

"I (We, Revised Version) must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." John 9:4.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had been in conflict with the Jews, who, stung by the truth, had taken up stones to stone Him (John 8:52). He was walking away from them, but had scarcely gotten out of their sight before He saw a man who had been blind from his birth. Though in immediate danger, He, with utmost composure and deliberation, stopped to give sight to the unfortunate man. So intent was He upon the accomplishment of His task that neither slander (8:41) nor stones (8:52) could turn Him aside from it.

Christ's ruling passion bore Him on through danger and suffering, and made Him calmly defy all opposition. His meat and drink were to do the will of Him Who sent Him into the world, and to finish His work. His first recorded words were, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). The manner in which He went about that business reminded His disciples of the Scripture, "The zeal of Thy House hath eaten me up." The unity of His purpose was never broken for a moment. No secondary object was ever allowed to eclipse the primary one. In this He is the supreme example of all who tire so soon, and give up so readily.

I. The Purpose of Life.

Observe the different effects produced upon Christ and His disciples by the sight of this blind man. The disciples wanted to talk, but Christ wanted to act. They wanted to discuss the man, but Christ wanted to help him. They were concerned about his past, but Christ was concerned about his future.

The disciples concluded that this man's blindness was due to his own or his parents' sin, but Christ refused to be drawn into a fruitless discussion regarding the origin of evil. He had not come into the world to explain evil, but to triumph over it. No doubt there is a place for speculation and conjecture, but these can never heal the sick nor win the lost. The attitude of Christ may be expressed in these words, "You may guess and argue, but I must work."

Socrates and Plato philosophised, but Christ saved. Christ came into this world, not primarily to say something, but to do something; not to make scholars, but saints. He came to work, and He calls us to work. About His and our task He tells us some things, which we cannot afford to neglect or to forget. He teaches us that:

1. The work is divine in its character.

"The works of him that sent me." It was God's work which Christ came to do, and which He calls us to do. Our Lord said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). The Father works through the Son, and the Son works through His followers.

Christ never looked on such an unfortunate person as this blind man without being moved to pity. Human need always stirred Him into activity, whether that need was physical, mental or spiritual. Anybody who can stand face to face with human need and not be moved to do something about it is not properly related to Christ. When He saw the blind man, He felt that the Father had sent Him to help just such people. In the synagogue at Nazareth He had declared that He had been 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.

The work is not ours, but it belongs to God. He is the architect; we are but the laborers. He is the leader; we are but the followers. He is the general; we are but the soldiers. He is the redeemer; we are but the missionaries. We cannot convict anyone of sin, or lead anyone to repentance, or give life to anyone. This is God's work, but in accomplishing it He would use us. He would employ us to declare and demonstrate to men His saving purpose and power.

2. The work is varied in its expression.

A great variety of activities is involved in what we call Christian service. The works of God are as varied as the needs of men.

Christ performed these manifold works of God by preaching, teaching, healing, praying, enduring, rebuking, encouraging and waiting. His works provide labor for us all; for the preacher, the teacher, the singer, the secretary, the deacon, the treasurer, the sexton, the visitor and the church member. Christ did not choose the easy, and shun the difficult. He was content to do whatever His Father appointed. We should be willing to do the same.

3. The work is universal in its scope.

The place of need is the location for work. Intending to do the works of God, Christ selected the most appropriate places in which to do them. He brought to a world of spiritual needs heavenly supplies. The Bread of Life came to a hungry world; the Water of Life came to a thirsty world; the Light of Life came to a dark world; the Eternal Life came to a perishing world. Because this is a world of sin, it is the proper sphere for the activities of the redeeming God, through His Son and His people.

II. The Urgency of Our Task.

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

1. The obligation is personal.

It is commonly thought that the work of spiritual ministry is the prerogative of the prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers, but God's Word makes it clear that these "gifts" come down from above "for the perfecting of the saints."

Every Christian should be a worker. We cannot delegate this responsibility nor discharge any duty by proxy. "I must work the works of him that sent me." I must do it if nobody else does. I am commissioned; I am under an obligation; and I shall be held accountable. If every Christian would take this fact to heart, what a difference it would make! Today we are in great danger of losing ourselves in organizations, and thereby trying to evade our individual duties and responsibilities. Each of us should realize that he has a work to do which cannot be done by anyone else, and which, if he fails to do it, will go undone. "I must work."

2. The opportunity is limited.

"While it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." After our Lord's crucifixion there was no longer the opportunity for the performance of the works characteristic of His earthly life. The "night" presents rest only from the works which belong to the corresponding "day." The language is figurative for life and death. Death puts an end to all human activity on earth, even to Christ's own as a friend and teacher. Undoubtedly He had His death in view when He said, "I must work while it is day: the night cometh."

In His interpretation of the "day," Christ used the language of urgency. One's mission must be fulfilled in the day of opportunity or not at all. Christ called His lifetime a day in order to show us that He was impressed with the shortness of it.

Not is it otherwise with us. Limits are set to our opportunities and we cannot extend them. Our day has its evening as certainly as its morning. The period of our work on earth is a prescribed and unalterable one; we cannot add a year to our lives. Life is given to us not for pleasure, but for progress; not for ease, but for toil. How much there is to be done, which must be done before sunset, if it is not to remain undone for ever.

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. Time and opportunity pass away rapidly. We cannot afford to throw away our opportunities. What we do in God's service must be done quickly. What we do to help others and to glorify God must be done now. The day wanes, the night cometh, the opportunity passes and eternity hastens. The value of life is measured by quality, and not by length. Its pathos is misuse, and not suffering. It is a failure not when our dreams are unfulfilled, but when our work is left undone.

"The night cometh, when no man can work." 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." When the night came Christ 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.

3. The occupation is impelling.

"I must work the works of him that sent me." Surely we feel this holy constraint, this divine compulsion! No man will do anything really great until he feels that he must.

Paul felt like that about his preaching. He said, "Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel." The world lieth in wickedness, therefore, we must work. Satan is very bold, therefore, we must work. Men are dying, rapidly, therefore, we must work. Souls are perishing, therefore, we must work. Feeling the impulses of the coming eternity, let us really get to work, constrained by the sight of sin and the love of Christ. While the night tarries, let us speed on with all our might. Until the night of death ushers us into a more glorious day, let us work.