

THE GLORY OF YOUTH

"The glory of young men is their strength." Proverbs 20:29.

The Book of Proverbs was written by Solomon when he was in the zenith of his strength. He had not lost the vigor and elasticity of youth, but to these he had added the valuable experience and sound judgment of mature years. From no one, probably do counsels come to young people with so much force and effect as from one who is in the prime of life.

This wonderful book merits frequent perusal and study. Its thirty-one chapters, answering to the thirty-one days of the month, suggest the propriety of a monthly reading of it. The whole tone of the book is such as to develop true manliness and nobility of character. There is nothing little about it. As you dwell in the midst of these proverbs, you will breathe a bracing and an exhilarating air. You will develop a stronger manhood and womanhood, and become better able to face the difficulties and to cope with the temptations of life. Nobody is really complete without the true religion which they enunciate.

Each period of life has a value and a glory of its own. There is a beauty in spring to which no other season of the year can approach. The vivid green of the opening leaves, and the meadows carpeted with early flowers give to spring a glory all its own. But the other seasons also have their peculiar charms. It is no less pleasant to look upon the landscape at midsummer, when the woods are in their full dress, and the valleys are covered with crops, or in the autumn when the harvest is being gathered in, and the flowers have given place to fruit. As certainly as spring is the time of hope and promise, autumn is the season of realization and fulfillment, and we are well content that the one should be lost in the other. So it is with the different periods of our lives -- each has its special charm and distinct advantages. We like to dwell upon the loveliness of childhood, but we would not like to see our sons and daughters remain children forever. It is pleasant to experience the energy and hope of youth, but there are good things which cannot be ours until we reach mature life, and even grey hairs.

Everything which God has made possesses a glory or a beauty of its own, and peculiar to itself. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory" (I Corinthians 14:41). The glory of the ocean is its depth, its immensity and its power. The glory of the flower is its coloring and its fragrance. The glory of little children is their guilelessness and their helplessness. "The glory of young men is their strength." The glory of the aged is their reverent and chastened dignity and their calmness.

Other things will come to young men by and by, but strength is the thing that comes first. The glory of young men is not their wisdom. Young men are not generally very wise. They make many mistakes. The time for wisdom will come, whether the wisdom arrives or not.

The excellence of the various ages of men differs greatly. The glory of a young man is not identical with the beauty of an old man. The common mistake is that in the narrowness of our personal experience we judge other periods of life by the standards that only apply to those in which we are living personally. That accounts for undue admiration and unreasonable disgust.

In energetic youth the fresh and unfaded powers are just opening out to their full activity. All kinds of fresh activities spring out of the fertile soil of youth. Indolence in youth would be disgraceful. Experience ripens with years. Strength may be lost, but experience will be gained. There is an exchange. The beauty of age may be seen in the countenance, finely chiseled with delicate lines of thought and feeling into a rare grace and dignity. The higher beauty is that of the soul, such as was evident in the case of Simeon when he held the infant Jesus in his arms.

Our text makes a clear and incisive statement, with nothing leading up to it and nothing leading away from it. It says that strength is the peculiar glory of young men. This statement is as true today as it was when it was written thousands of years ago. But the interpretation given to it changes with the variations in civilization. All men admire strength, but the kind of strength which is revered, honored and idolized changes as intelligence and morality and civilization change with any people.

If you go back far enough in the history of the Hebrews, you will come to a time when Samson was the glory of his people. Samson's glory was in his strength, but it was physical only. Because he had the power to seize a young lion in his brawny hands and tear it to pieces, because he could take the jaw-bone of a wild donkey and mow down his enemies more rapidly than any other man could have done with a sword, because he could carry away the gates of a city on his shoulders, he was admired and revered and exalted to be a judge and a leader of the people.

The word which we find in our text, descriptive of that peculiar type of strength which is the glory of young men, is a singularly suggestive and magnificent one. It stems from that ancient word which means "to pant," as one pants for breath when he is exerting every power in some great contest. It pictures one who has set himself a difficult task which will call for the bringing into play of every ounce of strength and energy within reach. It is the panting for breath which comes with all resolute and exacting effort. This word also contemplates a victory of some sort to be won. It always keeps the end in view, namely, an overcoming or a victory. It refers to the strength of him who pants to be a conqueror or victor.

This panting for victory should reveal itself in the life of every young person in four realms.

I. The Physical.

It is a young man's glory to have a healthy, strong and vigorous bodily frame. In the highest sense this is right and greatly to be desired. Physical strength is one of God's good gifts and an adornment and glory to any man. This desire for and glorifying of strength in the physical realm is seen in the admiration given to those who excel in the gymnasium, on the athletic field, at the bat or work, that the glory of a young man is his physical strength. A good physique and bodily strength are desirable and a glory to any person who may possess them.

It would be difficult to overestimate the value of a splendid physique. But we should remember that the body is not manhood. To be sure, it is bound up with manhood, is part of it and has to do with it, but real

manhood involves far more than just the physical. It should be remembered also that the development of physical strength depends largely upon ourselves. Not every person can become a physical giant, but most young men can become strong physically.

II. The Intellectual.

I would not belittle physical strength. To take care of physical strength and, if possible, increase it by exercise and discipline is of tremendous importance. It is a shame for any person to waste his physical strength and ability by self-indulgence or dissipation. It is not enough to have physical strength, only. The man who has physical strength, but lacks the corresponding mental power and force, resembles too much the "horse or mule who have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle," who have not sufficient intellect to control themselves. There are those with strong bodies who are so weak intellectually that they cannot pass the courses in school or the examination for induction in the armed forces of the country.

The glory of youth is their intellectual strength. Solomon said, "Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it." No individual or institution can confer brains where nature has withheld them, and yet it is true that intellectually we are very much what we make ourselves. I want to say to you who are in school that "What you are to be you are now becoming."

There is a legitimate pride which every man may take in the possession of a sound reason, a calm judgment and a vigorous brain. He will do his best to cultivate, improve and use his mental powers, and will deny himself any luxury which tends to weaken or impair them. It has been said that there are two reasons why some people don't mind their own business; one is that they do not have any business, and the other is that they do not have any mind. Truly, it is a good thing to have a mind and to use it.

Your intellectual strength is your glory. What does your reason tell you about the wisdom of accepting the pleasures of time to the utter neglect of eternity? You think life insurance is a good thing, and so it is. I ask you then, "What do you think of soul insurance?" "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (I Timothy 4:8). Godliness makes a man industrious and honest. Godliness is always elevating and refining. It always makes for enriched lives and happier homes.

III. The Moral.

Many people, who are strong physically and brilliant intellectually, have been defeated through lack of moral strength. Lord Byron was considered the most brilliant man of his day, but moral weakness covered him with disgrace. Let us remember that there is no true glory to youth unless it is controlled by moral principle.

The glory of young men is their moral strength. It is a grand thing for a man to have a delicate moral sensitiveness and a strong moral determination. By the former he will scent evil afar off, and by the latter he will keep out of the way of the tempter, or he will resist his temptations. The very badge of true manliness is self-control. Anyone who is devoid of self-control cannot pretend to stand upon the platform of real manhood.

Some do not have the moral strength and courage to do right. There are men who will face the guns of the enemy on the field of battle, and brave the storms at sea, and yet they do not have the moral courage to stand up for the truth when it is assailed in their presence. Even a sneer or a jeer will take their feet from under them.

It is a grand thing to be able to carry out one's convictions. Decision of character is certainly a noble quality. It is glorious to be able to say "No" and mean "No," or to say "I will," and, like Daniel, to mean "I will," in spite of the lions. The man who is master of himself is stronger than he that taketh a city. There is no form of conquest so honorable as victory over self. There is no glory in floating with the current, yielding to every desire, taking the path of least resistance, gratifying every appetite and being content to live an ignoble life, the world not one whit the better for our having lived in it.

Of all the mad delusions, there is none greater than the one that young people must "sow their wild oats" if they are to have a harvest of pleasure. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." There is nothing manly in sin. The first step from virtue is a step away from true manhood, and at each succeeding step the man becomes weaker and weaker. There is no glory in drifting with the current. Floating is essential weakness. A cork can float. Going against the current is evidence of strength. Moral weakness is a disgrace, but moral strength is your pride and glory.

IV. The Spiritual.

The supreme glory of youth is in spiritual strength. I place this last, but it is the most important of all. I go beyond nature to grace; beyond the human to the divine; for this strength is really the strength of God made yours by faith. A mere brute may surpass you in physical strength; even an atheist may compete with you in moral strength; but when you come to this, you leave them all a thousand leagues behind, for only a believer can say with David, "He strengthened me with strength in my soul." Without the grace of God in your heart, the physical, intellectual and moral strengths will avail you little and will prove to be empty and short-lived glory. Youth is never at its best without hope in God, without enthusiasm for high and holy ideals, without faith in the great spiritual realities, and without that communion and fellowship with Christ that brings to the heart the glow of heroic devotion to goodness and to truth. Be a complete person. Develop the physical, the intellectual, the moral and the spiritual sides of your nature and personality.