

The Eventful Life

By
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*“And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died”
(Genesis 5:27)*

[Editor’s note: In the days before sensitivity developed over separation of church and state, public high schools would invite a local minister to preach to the graduates in what was called a baccalaureate address as a way of creating a spiritual focus during such a momentous occasion. This sermon was delivered in 1946 and appears to be a message for a baccalaureate service. The school is not named; however, we know that he married in May 1945 and became pastor of the East Rockingham P. H. Church in July of that same year.

To keep this in perspective, Rev. Robinson would have been 32 years old when he preached this sermon. If it was a high school baccalaureate address, this was quite a distinction for a young, newly married, Pentecostal preacher to be selected for such a significant event in the life of a public community. In addition, this message is exceptional and reveals the development and maturity of a young preacher. We tend to forget that Rev. Robinson was only 51 when he died, that he was in his 30s when serving as pastor of East Rockingham (the first IPHC church to exceed 1000 in attendance), and that he was in his 40s when he rose to national prominence, first as superintendent of the South Carolina Conference and then as Assistant General Superintendent of the IPHC.]

It is customary on such occasions to select some eminent character who has appeared upon the horizon and stood in his day like a giant among men and who by courage, faith and perseverance lifted the moral, spiritual and economical standards of the race to an all time high or who by some special endowment of prophetic insight was able to interpret the capitals of justice and write out a new pattern of life and conduct for his fellow men. If the purpose is to inspire in the field of religious endeavor, it is a natural thing to bring up the name of such men as Joseph, David or Paul, magnify their virtues and set them up as ideal patterns and true examples.

But contrary to custom and conventionality, it is my purpose to discuss a man who never did thing worthwhile that we know of; a man whose life’s story and earthly

biography is written in one short paragraph. There is nothing about his life that is attractive, nothing to draw one to him. He never won distinction for anything except for having the most birthdays. His was the unusual tragedy of the man who lived too long. Legion is the number of men in every generation who die too soon, but only a few like Methuselah who live too long. His life had length but no depth. He was the oldest man that has ever lived but there was not one thing that ever transpired in the nearly one thousand years of his life that ever quickened the pulse of the most hopeful man or woman that has lived since his day.

At first glance he might be excused for not doing anything because of his meager opportunity; but upon closer observation, we find that he had opportunities that few men of any time has had. He was the son of Enoch, the Godliest man in the Old Testament. From his youth he had the counsel of the man who walked with God, yet his leaden feet never took him walking with his father's God.

His grandson was Noah, the greatest preacher of righteousness from Adam to John the Baptist. Yes, in his old days, he came under the influence of the greatest firebrand for God, yet despite all the preaching of Noah, tradition tells us that Methuselah went down in the flood with all the other Antediluvians. The study of this most useless life can be of inestimable value if we study it with the view of profiting from his failures.

In the first place, we learn that it is not the number of birthdays that count, but it is what we do with the days that God gives us. It is not how long we live, but how we live. There are a few prerequisites that go to make up a successful life. Sometimes these come from our natural, human heritage. Sometimes these are acquired. Methuselah's natural heritage was extensive. He had Godly parents, good health, challenging environment,

long life, and most of all, standing at each end of his life were two of the great moral and spiritual giants of all time – Enoch and Noah. This wonderful heritage challenged his potentialities, but he found not the basic qualities to realize his potential. Why did he fail? What did he miss along the way that you must not?

I. Moral Courage

The first basic quality for success is moral courage. There is the apparent absence of this in Methuselah's life. When this important factor is lacking in any life of any day, he cannot succeed. In our times immorality is unbridled. The moral standards of our country are at an alarmingly low ebb. The need for young men and young women of moral courage who stand for the right in the face of multiplied temptations to do wrong is imperative. Corrupt conditions caused by vices of almost every conceivable kind are undermining our religious training, destroying our youth, wrecking our homes, defeating the purpose of education, encouraging political corruption, promoting crime, and eating like a deadly cancer at the very vitals of our Christian land.

II. Purpose

Methuselah seemed to have no purpose, no conviction, no motive for his long life. His life was not filled with radiance. No ringing challenge awakened his heart. His life was uneventful. How meaningless life is when there is no purpose, how empty and hollow without a noble motive, how useless and entirely unworthy when it is a mere existence and nothing more.

To simply exist is not enough. Our day and our times call for a glorious life, for a full life. Opportunities abound. Challenges are everywhere. Here are two blind men. Our hearts go out to them. One is seen daily on the street eking out a bare existence by

begging. He is satisfied just to be there, just to exist. The other, his name is William Braille, did not sit on some street corner and mourn his fate. He arose and emancipated the blind by creating what we know as the Braille alphabet for the blind.

When one passes from the sphere of simple existence into the realm of full and glorious living, a transformation takes place. There will be no reservations regarding sacrifices to make, places he'll go, efforts he'll put forth. For such a soul, the wilderness becomes a paradise, the desert an oasis, the mountain vastness an ever-blooming dell of beautiful flowers, and the heathen country a highway for the Lord. Then, religion is not a weak, spineless sentiment but a vital, living reality. Worship to God is not an irksome ritual, but a source of genuine delight. Service to the Lord does not depend upon circumstances because he lives for eternity and not for time. He no longer is satisfied to simply exist but is awakened to a full and victorious life.

III. Character

The absence of real character in any life spells defeat. Robert E. Lee when offered \$50,000 to head a questionable business concern and told that they needed his name said, "My name is the heritage of my parents. It is all I have, and gentlemen, it is not for sale." God is looking for men who have no price, men who cannot be bought, men of real character and sterling worth. Without character disaster lurks at every corner and defeat is certain. Men with real character are the backbone of home and religious life, of business and political life. I had rather have it said of me when I walk life's road no more, "He was a Godly man, a man of principle" than to have it said that "He became politically famous" or "He was an intellectual giant." It is better to be righteous than rich. It is better to have character than to rank with the famous.

Our prisons are filled with men of ability, genius, and squandered opportunities. Men rarely fail for lack of capacity or lack of opportunity. They fail for the want of character. God has given us a world ready for success. He has banked its mountains with gold, strewn diamonds on the land, sprinkled seas with pearls, veined earth's strata with silver, and enriched with seemingly limitless pools of oil. The spiritual realm is even more rich than the natural order and there are multiplied opportunities for success. Yet men fail. Why? It is for lack of character.

IV. Vision

It seems evident that Methuselah who excelled at long life did not have vision. Where there is vision, there is activity. According to the Bible, where there is no vision, the people perish. Visions are either baneful or beneficial. It is not only necessary to have vision, but one must have the right kind of vision. For example, Napoleon had a vision of universal monarchy. The result: he drenched the land with blood. Hitler had a vision of a race of supermen ruling civilization. The consequence: he left destruction, death, and disaster in his path.

There are scores of examples of men with vision. Two will suffice here. Paul had a vision of spreading the Gospel around the world, of reaching the Jew and the Gentile, the slave and the free, the educated and the ignorant. Few ministers have ever traveled under such difficult conditions or suffered such horrible calamities or been given such exceptional opportunities to preach in so many places to such different kinds of people. By the time he finished his life, the church had been established in nearly every corner of Asia Minor.

Luther as a young man had a vision of a purged, reformed church. His teacher tried to dissuade him by saying, “Go thy way, silly monk, and pray God and if it be his will, he will correct the abuses of his church. But what hast thou to do with it?” What did he have to do with it, indeed? Luther brought about the greatest revival of the church which we call the Great Reformation. Great men of all ages who have left their footprints on the sands of time and have arisen to interpret the capitals of justice for their fellow men have been men of vision, men who dared by faith and by grim determination and sheer perseverance to transform their visions into vital realities.

V. Faith in God

Where there is genuine faith in God, life will not be uneventful. It does not matter what field of endeavor you may enter, you cannot truly succeed without faith in God. Let your faith in God be among your prized treasures. Doubt leads to fatalistic despair; faith draws to optimistic havens. Doubt has given us fearful and shameful paganism; faith gives the world Christian principles of love and hope. Doubt leads to cynicism and sadness; faith leads to the star-lit heights of happiness. Doubt has driven its followers to defeat and disaster; faith has propelled men of vision to achieve the impossible.

Doubt expelled Adam and Eve from Eden’s paradise, deluged the world in the flood, sent Elijah swooning under the Juniper tree, delayed the star of hope for Thomas, and draped the world with the blackness of the Dark Ages. Oh, the miseries and woes doubt and unbelief have wrought. Nations and men have been brought to the depths of ruin and despair by its grip. Hear the testimonies of some of her victims. Voltaire exclaimed, “I am abandoned by both God and men . . . I will die and go to hell.” Hobbs said, “I say again, if I had the whole world to dispose of, I would give it all to live one

day. I am about to take a leap in the dark.” Pain cried, “Oh, Lord, help me. Oh, God, what have I done to suffer so much. But there is no God. But if there should be, what is to become of me hereafter?” Ingersoll whispered, “I am mistaken. I have live in vain.” Above all, young friends, never give up to the fatalistic program of doubt. Keep a clear faith in God. It will serve as a mighty anchor for you in the storms of life.

VI. Making our Years Count

It is not the number of years you live that counts, but how well you invest the years you have. Let no man despise your youth. Some of the greatest heroes of all time made their mark when they were young. Alexander the Great completed most of his conquests by the age of 30. Joan of Arc achieved greatness and died before she was 20. Mozart captured all Europe with his beautiful symphonies when he was a mere youth. Washington was a distinguished colonel at 22. Patrick Henry was 27 when he shouted, “Give me liberty or give me death.” Hamilton was secretary of state at the same age. Gladstone was a member of parliament at 22. Charles Fox became a legislator at 19. Bacon graduated from Cambridge at 16. Columbus was 28 when he formed his idea of sailing west to the Indies. In the realm of Christianity, Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, and Moody were all spiritual warriors when they were young men. The sublime pattern, Jesus, the Son of God, our savior, accomplished the will of his Father providing salvation to the world by the age of 33.

In conclusion, let me say to you, the class of 1946, it is not the number of years you live that counts, but how well you live. It is not the generation in which you live that spells your success, but it is how you live in your generation. Neither is it the number of opportunities that make the man, but how you make your opportunities.