

A Polished Shaft - d.I. Moody

by J. Wilbur Chapman

J. Wilbur Chapman emphasizes the importance of personal preparation and surrender to God for effective Christian service, using the metaphor of a polished shaft to illustrate readiness for His work.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:7

Topics: "Surrendered Life", "Spiritual Preparation"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman, inspired by Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall, emphasizes the importance of personal preparation for effective personal work, highlighting the need for individual soul culture above all else. He draws parallels between the preparedness of Jesus as the servant of Jehovah and the surrendered life of a Christian worker, emphasizing the necessity of aligning one's will with God's will. Chapman encourages believers to live surrendered lives, fully equipped by God's experiences, and to maintain a close relationship with God to receive His power and direction for service.

Transcript

"He hath made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me," Isaiah xlix. 2.[1] Personal preparation is essential to the best success in personal work. No familiarity with the methods of other workers; no distinction among men because of past favours of either God or men; no past success in the line of special effort; no amount of intellectual equipment and no reputation for cleverness in the estimation of your fellowmen will take the place of individual soul culture, if you are to be used of God.

Thou must be true thyself, If thou the truth would teach; It takes the overflow of heart To give the lips full speech.

The words of Isaiah the Prophet literally refer to Him who was the servant of Jehovah. He was God's prepared blessing to a waiting and needy people. He came from the bosom of the Father that He might lift a lost and ruined race to God. And swifter than an arrow speeds from the hand of the archer when the string of the bow is drawn back, He came to do the will of God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we find Him saying, "Lo I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of me I delight to do thy will." This was the spirit of all His earthly life. When He was hungry and sent His disciples to buy meat, He found it unnecessary to partake of the food they brought to Him, saying, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." And when He came to the garden of Gethsemane, well on to the climax of His sacrificial life, we hear Him saying again, "Not my will, but Thine be done." In such a completely surrendered life we have a perfect representation of the prepared Christian worker.

In the expression of Isaiah we have also the thought of His anguish. "He was made a polished shaft." In these days when there is a disposition to place Jesus upon the level with others who have wrought for the good of humanity, it is well to remember that He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. There is also the thought of the beauty of His character, for He is a "polished shaft," "chiefest among ten thousand," and "the One altogether lovely." He is "the lily of the valley" for fragrance, and "the rose of Sharon" for beauty, and thus prepared He stands before us beckoning us on to a work which is indescribable in its fascination. Calling His disciples He said, "I will make you fishers of men." The same promise is made to us. Working His miracles He said to those about Him, "Greater works than these shall ye do." We have only to follow in His footsteps and walk sufficiently near to hear His faintest whisper when He directs us to be, in the truest sense of the word, successful personal workers.

It is a great encouragement to hear Him say, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The shaft mentioned by Isaiah is an arrow prepared with all care. The quiver in which this arrow is placed is carried on the left side of the archer, placed upon the string of the bow, the archer drawing back the string adds to the elasticity of bow and string his own strength, and the shaft is off to do the archer's will. There is in this story an illustration for all Christian workers. Fitness for service lies first of all in divine endowment. God has given to each one of us special and peculiar qualifications. If we live as we ought to live, exercising the gift that is in us; the painter may paint for His glory; the poet may sing and speak of Him; the preacher may preach and declare His righteousness, and should we live in less conspicuous spheres than these, we have only to do our best with that with which He has endowed us and our lives will be pleasing to Him.

It lies also in the divine call. The shaft was made for a special purpose. We have been created to do His will. The possession of power is not enough; talents unused will rise at the Judgment Seat to rebuke us. God gives us ability and then calls us forth into the field that we may exercise it. Fitness for service also lies in the response to God's will. The possession of power and the call of God may both be realised and we may still fail. It is when we say "I will," to God that human weakness is linked to divine strength and then a great service is possible.

Life is not drudgery, it is an inspiration.

"Let me but do my work from day to day, In field or forest, at desk or loom; When vagrant wishes beckon me away, Let me but find it in my heart to say, This is my work, my blessing not my doom; Of all who live I am the only one by whom This work can best be done."

The word of the Prophet Isaiah is a picture of the child of God, as well as of Him who is our inspiration for service. There is the thought of definiteness of use in the shaft. Other articles may be created for a variety of purposes. This shaft is made to go at the owner's will. There is only one way to live in this world and that is according to the will of God and for His glory.

It matters little where I was born, Or if my parents were rich or poor; Whether they shrank from the cold world's scorn, Or walked in the pride of wealth secure; But whether I live a surrendered man, And hold my integrity firm in my clutch, I tell you, my brother, as plain as I can, It matters much!

It matters little where be my grave, Or on the land or on the sea. By purling brook, or 'neath stormy wave, It matters little or nought to me; But whether the angel of death comes down And marks my brow with his loving touch, And one that shall wear the victor's crown, It matters much!

There is also in this picture of the shaft the thought of directed motion. The aim is everything. The arrow cannot aim itself. There is no such thing as an aimless life. Our energies are either being directed for Christ or against Him; in the interests of humanity or contrary to them. Every child of God must reach the place where he will say, Not my will, but Thine, O God, be done; not my path but Thine, O Christ, be travelled; not my ambitions realized but Thine own purposes in me fulfilled, my Heavenly Father. The progress of such a life is peace, the consummation of it the most perfect victory.

When I am dying how glad I shall be That the lamp of my life has been blazed out for Thee. I shall be glad in whatever I gave, Labour, or money, one sinner to save;

I shall not mind that the path has been rough, That Thy dear feet led the way is enough. When I am dying how glad I shall be, That the lamp of my life has been blazed out for Thee.

In the picture of the archer and his arrow, there is an illustration of derived energy. The arrow placed upon the string and drawn back by the archer speeds away to do the master's will. It has no power in itself; it flies forward in the master's strength. God is always seeking an outlet for His power along the line of service. It is when our lives are surrendered to Him that victory is possible. A friend of mine took for his year text the expression "I believe, and I belong." We might well add, "I live and I love," and because I do both I will obey. Ole Bull once played his violin in the presence of a company of University students. He charmed them, they knew at once that they were in the presence of a master. When he was finished playing, one who was present said to him, "What is the secret of your power, have you a special bow, or is it in the instrument you use?" Ole Bull responded, "I think it is in neither, but it has always seemed to me that I had power in playing because I waited to play until I had an inspiration, when my soul was overflowing with music and I could not stay the torrent that was back of me; it is then that I take my violin and the music flows forth." If we were always passive in the hands of the Master He would show forth in and through us His marvellous grace and power.

The polishing of the shaft is always necessary. God uses all our experiences to equip us for life. Parental influence; the power of prayer as offered in our behalf by others; the education given us in the schools; the disappointments of life which seem almost to crush us; the sorrows which are indescribable; all these are like the touch of a master's hand, and forth from such a school and such a training we ought to come prepared to do the will of God.

The arrow was carried in the quiver and the quiver was near to the master's side. Nearness to God is essential if we are to be used of God. He chooses the vessel nearest His hand. This has always been true. The apostles, martyrs, missionaries, and saints who have finished their work and have gone on before, as well as those who live to-day, prove the statement that we must be in closest relationship with Christ if we are to be entrusted with the gift of power. It is when we are in the secret place of the Most High that we learn God's will concerning us. Many people do not know God's will because they live too much in the bustle and confusion of life. God speaks His best messages to us in whispers, not in thunder tones, and we must be still to know that He is God and study to be quiet that we may go forth from quietness to conquer. The practice of the quiet hour is the secret of many a soul's victorious service.

Shut in with God alone, I spend the quiet hour; His mercy and His love I own, And seek His saving power

Shut in with God alone; In meditation sweet, My spirit waits before the throne, Bowed low at Jesus' feet.

Shut in with God alone; I praise His holy name, Who gave the Saviour to atone For all my sin and shame.

Shut in with God alone; And yet I have no fear, I rest beneath the cleansing blood, And perfect love is here.

1. Suggested by Dr Charles Cuthbert Hall.

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