

1 Corinthians 4; Belfast Missionary conf.1964

by J.M. Davies

The sermon emphasizes the importance of choosing between worldly promotion and our individual responsibility before God for fruit-bearing, and prioritizing the furtherance of the gospel in our daily lives.

Duration: 12:04

Scripture: Judges 9:8, 1 Corinthians 4:8

Topics: "Spiritual Priorities", "Worldly Temptations"

Description

J.M. Davies emphasizes the importance of prioritizing spiritual responsibilities over worldly success in his sermon at the Belfast Missionary Conference in 1964. He reflects on 1 Corinthians 4:8, discussing how the apostles are seen as spectacles for the world, and challenges believers to consider their individual choices between worldly promotion and their ministry. Using the metaphor of olive oil, figs, and wine, he illustrates the necessity of bearing fruit for God and maintaining joy in the Lord, even when faced with tempting opportunities for prosperity. Davies warns against allowing earthly gains to overshadow the call to further the gospel, urging believers to hold tightly to their spiritual commitments. He concludes with a reminder of God's warnings to Israel about forgetting Him in times of prosperity.

Transcript

This is Mr. Davies of India, just a few minutes. Oh, brother, Mr. Naismith, my esteemed fellow missionary from India, is burdened with a word and I will be very brief with regard to the passages that have been before. We'll turn back again to Judges, Chapter 9, or maybe to save time, we'll just turn on to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 4. 1 Corinthians, Chapter 4, verse 8. Now we are full, now we are rich, we have reigned as kings without us, and I would to God it did reign, that we also might reign with you.

I think that God, for I think that God has set forth us, the apostles, last as it were appointed to death, for we are made a spectacle, a theatre unto the universe, both to angels and to men. Our brother has applied the parable, or the fable rather, of Jotham, historically, prophetically, and corporately. I think we do well to apply it individually, individually to every one of us here this afternoon.

There was the choice that had to be made. The oil tree, the olive tree rather, produced oil for the sanctuary, and if there was no olive oil, the sanctuary would be dark. There would be nothing for the lampstand if there was no olive oil.

Pure olive oil was used for the lampstand. The fig tree, of course, produced fruit for man to eat. The vine produced wine that cheers God and man.

The oil was to honor God and man. Here are three spheres of the believer's life. His witness in the sanctuary, his testimony there, his fruit according to Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit, the wine, that which gives real joy of heart to the believer, the joy of the Lord, is your strength.

And the question simply put in the table is this, applying it individually, are we going to take worldly promotion if that is going to mean sacrificing my ministry in the sanctuary? Is promotion going to take precedence over our individual responsibility before God for fruit-bearing? Is worldly prosperity--so you can put that into the place of promotion if you like--is worldly prosperity, is it going to be allowed to sap my joy in the Lord? Many a Christian has had to come to a place where he chooses that, where he has to make a choice between them. One man whom I know fairly well, many years ago in Canada, had the opportunity of going to a place where he would have received a very large, a very large, much larger salary than he was getting. But he felt the little assembly where he was needed him.

He said for the sake of the little assembly, he wouldn't accept the higher promotion. One brother of whom to whom I was referring in conversation today with some friends, a qualified engineer, then gave that up with a view of studying for the ministry, and went for some years down to the Dallas Seminary in Texas, came in touch with an assembly that took all the ideas of ministerialism out of him, and then he wondered what to do. What was going to be his path now? He had a talk with one of the elder brethren, and he said, Well, brother, go to the assembly.

Go home to where your home is, and live there, and seek to live honestly and quietly before God in the assembly, and see how God will guide you. And he went back, and after two years, the brethren said to him, What are you doing around here? You ought to be out seeking to serve the Lord, and that's what he was waiting for. A brother told me that he could have taken a job in a very well-known electrical firm in the state.

He was given the opportunity of taking that job any day he liked at eighteen thousand dollars a year, over six thousand pounds a year. The door was open for him to take it at any time, and instead of that, he went to serve the Lord in a very out-of-the-way, unknown place. What are we going to place value upon, brethren? There's going to be a time come when it may come far sooner than we may realize, when the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of eternity.

Prosperity at the expense of the oil and the witness, promotion at the expense of fruit, prosperity at the expense of the joy of the Lord. You have reigned as kings without us, says the apostle, and let me paraphrase that and bring it up to the modern day, please, shall I? You have reigned as kings at the expense of gospel preaching, or, to put it another way, you have reigned as kings at the expense of the furtherance of the gospel. That leaves the personal element out of it altogether.

At the expense of the furtherance of the gospel, the apathy of the Corinthian assembly on the one hand, the antipathy of us, and the hatred of the world on the other hand. That's the picture we've got there. Paul thinks of himself in the light of the gladiatorial games of Ephesus, as I stood in Ephesus in 1952 and saw that great amphitheater cut out to the hillside, there where they gathered for their games, and the platform made of earth.

Paul was thinking of that amphitheater where they had these games, he says, God has set forth us, the apostles, last, as it were criminals, those who were appointed to death. The last item in those gladiatorial games was the bringing in of a criminal who was appointed to death, upon whom a death sentence had been passed, but he was allowed to fight for his life with a man who had a drawn sword in his hand. If he could overcome the man with a drawn sword, then his life would be spared.

That's the picture Paul draws. God has set forth us, the apostles, last, as criminals appointed to death. The odds are all against them.

You think of men today in Africa, in parts of the Congo and Angola, in parts of other parts of the world. The odds are all against them. Everything is against them, humanly speaking.

The man without any weapon of defense or of offense, how could he overcome a man with a drawn sword? Paul says, we are fools for Christ's sake. We have reigned as kings at the expense of the fervorance of the gospel. Compare it, will you please, with Deuteronomy 6 and Deuteronomy 8 and 12, God's warning to Israel.

When they gave up, or when the nomadic life of the wilderness would be given up for the settled life of the land, don't forget this, don't forget. When you go to live in houses that you never built and drink water of wells that you never digged, then don't forget. When prosperity comes your way, hold it with a steady hand.

Take a steady hand to hold a full cup. My brother, my sister, our fellow brethren and sisters, God help us in His grace and in His mercy not to reign as kings here at the expense of the fervorance of the gospel. For His name's sake.

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