

Are You a Withered Leaf

by John Gifford Bellett

The sermon explores the spiritual implications of being a withered leaf versus a fruitful life through biblical examples.

Scripture: 1 Kings 11:4, Psalm 1:1, Luke 12:43, 2 Timothy 4:6

Topics: "Faithful Service", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Gifford Bellett preaches on the importance of living a fruitful and purposeful life, drawing from the contrasting examples of Isaac, Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. Bellett emphasizes the significance of not rusting out like Isaac but remaining steadfast and productive in serving God until the end, like the other faithful servants of God. He highlights the lessons we can learn from the lives of these biblical figures, showing the consequences of being laid aside, recovering oneself, or defiling oneself in the journey of faith.

Transcript

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither. (Psalm 1:1-3)

There is a common saying, "It is better to wear out than to rust out." But this better thing was not Isaac's. He rusts out. And such was the natural close of such a life. Was Isaac, I ask, a vessel marred on the wheel?

Was he a vessel laid aside as not fit for the Master's use? or at least not fit for it any longer? His history seems to tell us this. Abraham had not been such an one. All the distinguishing features of "the stranger here," all the proper fruits of that energy that quickened him at the outset, were borne in him and by him to the very end. Abraham's leaf did not wither. He brought forth fruit in old age. So was it with Moses, with David, and with Paul. They die with their harness on, at the plough or in the battle.

Mistakes and more than mistakes they made by the way, or in their cause, or at their work; but they are never laid aside. Moses is counselling the camp near the banks of the Jordan; David is ordering the conditions of the kingdom, and putting it into the hand of Solomon; Paul has his armour on, his loins girded. When, as I may say, the time of their departure was at hand (2 Tim. 4:6), the Master found them "so doing" as servants should be found (Lk. 12:43). But thus was it not with Isaac.

Isaac is laid aside. For forty long years we know nothing of him; he had been, as it were, decaying away and wasting. The vessel was rusting till it rusted out. There surely is meaning in all this, meaning for our admonition. And yet--such is the fruitfulness and instruction of the testimonies of God--there are others, in Scripture, of other generations, who have still more solemn lessons and warnings for us. It is humbling to be laid aside as no longer fit for use; but it is sad to be left merely to recover ourselves, and it is terrible to remain to defile ourselves.

And illustrations of all this moral variety we get in the testimonies of God. Jacob, in his closing days in Egypt, is not as a vessel laid aside, but he is there recovering himself. I know there are some truly precious things connected with him during those seventeen years that he spent in that land, and we could not spare the lesson which the Spirit reads to us out of the life of Jacob in Egypt. But still, the moral of it is this -a saint, who had been under holy discipline, recovering himself, and yielding fruit meet for recovery.

And when we think of it a little, that is but a poor thing. But Solomon is a still worse case. He lives to defile himself; sad and terrible to tell it. This was neither Isaac nor Jacob-it was not a saint simply laid aside, nor a saint left to recover himself. Isaac was, in the great moral sense, blameless to the end, and Jacob's last days were his best days; but of Solomon we read, "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Ki, 11:4), and this has made the writing over his name, the tablet to his memory, equivocal, and hard to be deciphered to this day.

Such lessons do Isaac and Jacob and Solomon, in these ways, read for us, beloved. They give us to see, in the house of God, vessels fit for use and kept in use even to the end - vessels laid aside, to rust out rather than to wear out--vessels whose best service it is to get themselves clean again-- and vessels whose dishonor it is, at the end of their service, to contract some fresh defilement.

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