

Putting Away Past Things

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of letting go of past things and focusing on present duties, finding comfort in faith in Christ's teachings and devotion to the service of love in his name.

Scripture: Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Letting Go", "Moving Forward"

Description

J.R. Miller addresses the challenge of letting go of past responsibilities and relationships that no longer serve us, emphasizing the importance of moving forward despite the emotional weight of loss. He illustrates how individuals often struggle to release their hold on past tasks and friendships, particularly in the face of death or betrayal. Miller encourages a faith in Christ's teachings about life after death and the necessity of focusing on present duties to find solace and purpose. He highlights that engaging in service to others can provide comfort and help fill the void left by those who have departed from our lives. Ultimately, he urges listeners to forget the past and embrace each new day with renewed spirit and purpose.

Transcript

One of the most serious problems of life--is the laying down of things with which we have nothing more to do. It is hard for us to let go of interests and affairs, for which we have been responsible for a time--but the responsibility for which is now another's, not ours. We are apt to want to keep our hand upon the old tasks--even when they are no longer ours! They seem to be part of our life--which we cannot lay down. The old man, when his work and his cares have passed to his sons, or to others--finds it almost impossible not to continue his hold upon things. The mother in her advanced years, when her daughters are in their own homes and she is guest now--her old age gently sheltered by their love, unconsciously thinks of them as children still and expects not only the old honor which is rightly hers and freely accorded--but oftentimes the old deference to authority, which is not her right.

In other ways, too, we find it almost impossible to break with our past. It is hard to give up a friend with whom one has been long associated, when by some providence the friend is taken away from one's companionship. Perhaps it is by death. The relation was one of sacred closeness. The friend was in all our life--one with us in all tender interests, the companion of our days and nights. We had learned to turn to him for counsel, to lean on him for support, to look to him for guidance and wisdom. We did nothing without him. He was eyes and hands and feet for us. He had long absorbed our early affection.

Then death takes him from us! It is easy to read over the comforts which the Scriptures have for us in our sorrow. We may also accept these comforts and let their quieting peace into our hearts. There may be no rebellion, no unsubmission in our thought. We may look forward to the after-life with sure hope of reunion. Yet it seems impossible to leave our friend out of our life, or to go on without him. Until yesterday he was in everything; how can we endure having him withdrawn from everything, every interest, every joy, every task, today? Yet that is the problem we must work out, for we cannot bring him back again. We must go on with our work--and must do it well. We must learn, therefore, to do without the companionship, the cheer, the inspiration, of the friend who has gone from us.

There are two thoughts which will help to make this possible:

first, a simple faith in Christ's teachings concerning the Christian's death and the other life;

second, a vivid sense of present duty.

If we clearly understand and fully believe that he who has gone from us is with Christ, living and continuing his life in a higher sphere, that he is happy and blessed, and actively engaged in his Redeemer's service--it will not be so hard to go on here without his bodily presence. Though we do not have him with us, cheering our earthly life as before--we have not really lost him. He is with us in all precious memories. The influence of his life broods over us and has an abiding benediction for us. We are sure of his unchanged love for us, though out of our sight, and of his continued sympathy with us in all our work, struggle, and sorrow. With such faith as this, our life here will not be lonely. We have Christ--and in Christ we have our friend, too, in a companionship that is full of precious joy and holy inspiration.

Then, further help in getting on without our friend who has been so much to us--is found in earnest devotion to our own duty. Though his work on earth is finished, ours is not, and we may not slacken our diligence until for us, too, the sun goes down.

In a great battle, the commanding officer, leading his men in an assault, came upon the body of his own son, lying on the field. His impulse was to stop and give way to his grief--but he dared not do it. His duty was with his command. The outcome of the battle depended upon him. So, falling upon the beloved form, he pressed a hot kiss on the dead lips, and then went on with his men, braver and stronger for his grief. We may never let life's tasks drop out of our hands for sorrow, not even for an hour. Our work must be finished before the end of the day--and we have not a moment to lose. When we come to render our account, grief will not excuse us for failure in duty, for tasks omitted, for life's work unfinished.

Besides, in no other way can the divine comfort come to us with such fullness, such sweetness, such strengthening power--as when our hearts and hands are busy in duties and tasks for others. This is the only truly wholesome way to live at any time. The last thing for one in bereavement, seeking comfort, is to be idle. Then the grief feeds upon the life itself, and wastes and wears it out. But when in our sorrow we turn away from self to ministries of love for others--our hearts find comfort. Thus, and thus only, can we learn to live without one who has been everything to us in the past.

There is another way in which one may go out of our life, and have to be given up irremediably. A letter received from a noble young woman tells of a friendship of years which has now come to an end through the faithlessness of one who had long professed sincere friendship--but who at last has proved unworthy. There had been years of confidence, when no one doubted that he was a good man, and faithful and loyal in his friendship. At length, however, there came disclosures which made it necessary for the young

woman to end at once, relations which had meant everything to her, and to put out of her life altogether, the friendship which, until that day, had seemed most worthy and satisfying.

Her friend had wrought himself into all her life. Their associations had been ideal. There had not been a shadow of fear in her love and trust. She had cherished many precious hopes for the future. For years she had had no thought of life apart from him. He was in all her pleasures, in all her plans, in all her dreams. Now the idol lies shattered at her feet, and there is no hope that it can ever be restored to its old place. It is certain that she must live henceforth without him.

But how can she do this? For one thing, she may say that he has no longer any rightful place in her life. By his own acts he has separated himself from her irrevocably. She must now fill the empty place with other interests. It will be hard for her to put away all that has been so dear, so essential to her happiness--but there is nothing else to be done.

Sometimes in such cases the grief over the disappointment is allowed to darken the wronged life, mar its beauty and hinder its usefulness. But it is not thus, that the Master would have one of his friends meet such a trial. He wants us in all experiences, to be victorious. When we must endure wrong--he would have us endure it sweetly and songfully. He knows how hard such an experience is, for he suffered the worst phases of false friendship in his own life. He understands, therefore, and sympathizes, and will help. This is a harder experience, than where a faithful friend has died, for then all the memories are sacred and the tie is still unbroken, for "Death doth hide-but not divide."

In this case, however, even the memory has been stained by the falseness at the last, and the separation is real and final. Yet there still is comfort in devotion to Christ, and to the service of love in his name. Always it is true--that the lonely life may find solace and satisfaction in ministering to others. In no other way does comfort come so surely and with such consoling power, to the empty heart. In feeding others--we feed ourselves. These are illustrations of a duty which oftentimes is very important--to cut ourselves altogether off from a past with which we now have nothing whatever to do. We are to forget the things which are behind--and press toward the things which are ahead.

We make a mistake when we allow the memories of the past or its influences, so to absorb our mind and heart as to unfit us for doing well the duties of the present. Emerson teaches the lesson well in a terse paragraph: "Finish every day--and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely; and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This day is all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays."

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