

Serving Our Generation

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life that serves others and reflects God's love and character, and encourages listeners to find and fulfill God's plan for their life.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 13:14, Psalm 23, Psalm 51, Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, Acts 13:36, Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:3-4, 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Topics: "Serving Others", "Fulfilling God's Will"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the significance of serving our generation as exemplified by David, who fulfilled God's will despite his imperfections. He highlights that true service involves selflessness and dedication to others, encouraging individuals to find their unique place in God's plan. Miller illustrates that even small acts of kindness can have a profound impact on the world, and that every life, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can contribute to the greater good. He concludes by reminding us that fulfilling God's will leads to a life of purpose and lasting influence, as seen in David's legacy.

Transcript

"David served his own generation by the will of God." Acts 13:36

It gives dignity and also sacredness to our life--to think as serving our generation. Every true-hearted person, realizing this truth, will seek to work out God's thought in his own character and life. Of course, we cannot do this perfectly, for nothing human is perfect. The artist fails to put all his vision, into his picture.

In all our life we do, even at our best--but a little of the beautiful work we intend and plan. We blunder and stumble in our holiest endeavors. Our clumsy hands mar the lovely ideals which our soul envisions. We set out in the morning with high resolves--but our evening confessions tell of many a shortcoming. We never live any day--as well as we know we should live.

Yet there is a sense in which, without attaining perfection, a Christian may fulfill God's plan for himself. One of the most interesting illustrations of such a life is David's. The Lord says, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who shall fulfill all my will." Then in another sentence, we catch the secret of this life which was so complete. We are told that he "served his own generation by the will of God." It is worth our while to look closely at this inspired description of a life that so pleased God, in order that we may learn how to work out the divine thought for ourselves.

There are several luminous words in the brief sentence, which make its meaning very clear. The word "served" is one of these. David served. This is not a favorite word. We naturally resent the idea of serving. It seems to have an ignoble meaning. But really, it is one of the royaltest of words. One who has not begun to serve--has not begun to live a godly life! God never yet made a life for selfishness. Jesus came to show us the perfect divine ideal of human living, and He served unto the very uttermost. "I came not to be served--but to serve," was His own declaration of His life's central thought and purpose. When they asked Him who was greatest in His kingdom, He said, "He who serves." We are to live not to get--but to give; not to be helped--but to help; not to receive--but to bestow.

Another phase of the thought lies in the fuller phrase David served his own generation. This is a large saying. What was David's generation? In general, it was the whole number of the people who lived when he did. Our generation is the entire human family living at the present time on the earth. How can any man serve all his own generation? There are hundreds of millions of people he can never see; how can he do anything for these? One way of serving our own generation, is to fill well the little place which we are assigned in God's providence. This is the answer to the question for the greater number of us. We can do most to bless the world at large--by being a true blessing to the little circle in the midst of which we are placed.

Another way in which we can serve our generation, is by giving to it something which will enrich it, which will add to its happiness and good, which will make it better, purer. We have an illustration of this in the story of David's life. He gave much to his generation. He began in a very humble way. He was a shepherd-boy, keeping his father's sheep. No doubt even then he did his lowly work well. Besides, although unconsciously, he was now in training for his larger duties, and he learned aptly. It was not long, until his life began to be a blessing.

One day there came a remarkable opportunity for this lad to serve his people and country. A great giant stalked before the lines of the Hebrew army, challenging the king and his warriors. By single combat, the question was to be decided. But there was no one in Saul's army who would accept the challenge and meet the giant. Day after day the mocking scene was repeated. Then David came to the field came on a simple errand to his brothers and his hand laid the proud giant in the dust! By this victory he served his nation served his generation.

Then followed a long period of sore trial, when the envy and hatred of Saul made David an exile. He was hunted among the hills by the king and his men--as if he had been a wild beast! His life was continually in peril. He suffered injury and wrong. But even in those days, he was serving his own generation. He did this by his noble bearing under wrong and persecution. He never resented the king's anger or the injustice of the treatment he received. He endured it all sweetly. On two occasions, when he had King Saul in his power, he would not harm him--but returned kindness for murderous hate. David served his generation most effectively during those dark years--by giving to it such an example of true and beautiful living.

We say that one who paints a fine picture, serves his generation. He sets before the eyes of men a fragment of beauty, which is a blessing to all who see it, leaving in human hearts a new thought of tenderness, a new vision of noble living, a sentiment which makes lives truer, richer, diviner. So does everyone serve his generation, who shows it a fragment of godly living: patience under trial, purity and uprightness under temptation, love and meekness under injury and wrong. The blessing of David's behavior while pursued by Saul, has stayed all these centuries since in the world, as a purifying, uplifting, enriching influence.

David also served his generation as king. Saul had failed. He was not a good king. He was not doing his work well. Then God removed him, and called David to the throne. In many ways, David's reign was a blessing. He conquered his people's enemies, and took possession of the whole land of promise. His was largely a work of conquest. He desired to build a temple for the Lord; but he was not permitted to do this, for this was not in God's plan for him--this was another man's mission. Yet the temple was in a sense, his. The thought of it was his. He purchased the site for it. He gathered vast treasures for its erection. Thus he served his generation, by what he did for the honor of God's name.

Anyone who sets the name of God in clearer light before men, so that its glory shall shine more widely and its influence touch more hearts and lives--has wrought a service for the race. The whole world was the better for David's reign as king of Israel. The light of his beneficent work reached all lands, and shines yet throughout all countries.

David served his generation also through the Psalms he wrote. He was the first to give sacred music a place in the worship of God. He organized the great choir which afterwards sang in the temple. Then he wrote the first hymns which were sung in God's worship. No one can estimate the value to his generation of this one part of David's serving. He who writes a sweet song which lifts men's hearts toward God, which kindles praise and devotion, which inspires joy and hope in sorrow, which gives new impulses to holy living--has done one of the noblest services to his fellow-men which it is permitted to mortal to do on this earth.

But the ministry of David's harp was not for his own generation only; it was for all after generations. David's Psalms have been sung now for nearly three thousand years. They have become an important part of the hymnody of the Christian church. Not even the Gospels are read more in the devotions of Christian people than some of David's Psalms. Who can ever estimate the service to the world of such single Psalms, as the twenty-third and the fifty-first? How many hearts have been comforted, how many fears quieted, how many trembling feet steadied as they entered the valley of death; how many tears of mourners dried, through the reading and singing of the shepherd Psalm? How many sinning souls have been led back to God along the paths of penitence, by the Psalm of repentance?

These are mere suggestions of the way David served his generation. He did it simply by being faithful in the place of present duty. It was not by any one act alone, that he blessed his generation. Of course, there were great single acts whose influence went out widely--but all these acts formed part of the one life.

David's shepherd life seemed lowly and obscure. How was he serving his generation then? He could not have slain Goliath and delivered his country's armies from the terror of the Philistine champion, if, as a shepherd lad, he had not become expert in the use of the sling. Nor could he have written the twenty-third Psalm in his old age, breathing into it the precious thoughts which have made it such a blessing to millions, if he had not been a shepherd himself in his boyhood, leading his sheep in the green pastures, beside the still waters, in right paths, through deep, dark valleys. The memories of his youth live in every line of that wonderful Psalm of old age.

Thus even his childhood had its place in his life of service. Each period fitted him for the next. In all his ways he was faithful. He lived to serve--to serve God and to serve his generation. In doing so, he served all generations after his own, to the end of time. The world is better, sweeter, richer, purer, brighter, today, because David lived, served, suffered, reigned, and sang.

No doubt David's was a rare life. But few other men in the world's history have been of such service to their own and after generations, as he was. Even among the great and good, the influence of but few reaches beyond their own times--except as all godly words and deeds live, being immortal. Besides, only a few men in a generation have power to reach, touch, and impress the whole generation. Hence what David did may seem to have no lesson for us. We cannot be kings. We cannot plan temples. We cannot write Psalms or hymns which shall live a thousand years. We are little people, and can fill only a little place. We cannot serve our generation in the same large way in which David served his. Yet each individual life has its own distinct place in the thought of God, and each may fill out its own pattern.

Even the smallest life lived well--blesses the world. We have only to be true to God and to love, the law of life, and our smallest words and deeds will, in some measure at least, make the whole race better. Every godly word we speak--adds something to the sum of goodness in the world. Every godly deed we do--makes it a little easier for others to do godly deeds, and lifts a little higher the standard of living among men. To make one person a little happier each day, to lighten one burden, to make one heart braver and stronger, to comfort one sorrow, to guide one perplexed soul into peace, to show one bewildered child the right path, to speak the word which helps one tempted person to overcome sin--one such service is enough to redeem a life from uselessness, and to make it a blessing to a whole generation.

Many people are oppressed and disheartened, by the seeming smallness and insignificance of their life. "I can be of no use in this great world," they say, "I am only one leaf in all the forests; one flower in all the gardens and fields." Very dispiriting is the effect of this feeling of littleness in this great, multitudinous life.

But we live as individuals. God knows and calls us by name. Each life is a distinct individuality. We know not what is small--or what is large. Each smallest deed of ours, starts influences which never shall cease to be felt in the universe. Poets tell us how the pebble dropped in the sea, starts wavelets which break on all earth's shores; and how the word spoken into the air, sets in motion reverberations which go round and round the sphere. We know at least, that no smallest act or word of love ever can be lost.

Much of life is only fragments unfinished things, broken sentences, interrupted efforts, pictures left uncompleted, sculptures only half hewn, letters only partly written, songs only begun and choked in tears. But not one of these fragments is lost--if it has love's blessed life in it.

God gathers the fragments; they are not lost. Then they stay in other lives, making the world better, sweeter, richer. Shall we call this a small thing? Even the lowliest life may thus serve its generation and all after generations. You may start something beautiful today--which shall bless the world to its remotest ages.

There is yet another word in this epitaph of David, which is needed to complete our lesson.

"David served his own generation, by the will of God." That is, the will of God was the guide of his life. God had a plan for his life. We are not haphazard things in this world; we are thoughts of God. The practical question is, "How can we find, and fulfill God's plan for our life?" We know it is possible to miss it altogether. King Saul missed God's plan for his life. He might have served his generation so as to bless it and bless all the world, leaving a name of honor and an influence for good for all after ages. Judas missed God's plan for his life. He might have been an apostle of Christ's grace, his name like fragrance; but instead, his picture is turned to the wall, and a hideous shame gathers about his name. Thousands more have missed finding and fulfilling God's thought for their life. Thousands are doing the same every day.

How do they miss it? By not accepting God's will for them. Saul began almost at once to take his own way, instead of God's. He obeyed only in part, or he did not obey at all. Judas resisted the teachings of the Master. He let the world into his heart. He gave way to the devil. He missed glory--and got shame and everlasting contempt. The lesson is very solemn. We can fail of beauty and good for our life, and miss the radiant loveliness God has planned for us. We surely will fail and miss all--if we refuse to fashion our life according to the will of God.

On the other hand, we may find God's plan for our life. David found it and fulfilled it. Thousands more have found it. The highest of all examples was Jesus Christ. He lived out perfectly the divine purpose. In all cases, the will of God has been the one law of His life. At every step we find Jesus referring to His Father's will. Then at last He could say, "Father, I have finished the work which you gave me to do." If we do God's will day by day, we shall serve our own generation and fill out the pattern of life, sketched for us by the great Master of all lives.

Then the end will be blessed. "David, after he had served his own generation, fell asleep." That was well. His work was done. Rest is sweet--when tasks are finished. He fell asleep--but his life goes on yet. God owned it and enshrined it. The songs he sang--we are singing today.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Timothy 4:7-8

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