

Things That Last

by J.R. Miller

The key to creating works that last is to be inspired by sincere love and to do them in the name of Christ.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:12

Topics: "Love in Action", "Eternal Impact"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of building a life on eternal values rather than temporary, superficial achievements. He warns against living a life that leaves no lasting impact, comparing it to building with perishable materials like wood and straw instead of gold and silver. Miller encourages believers to focus on love and service, as these are the only actions that will endure beyond this life. He illustrates that even small acts of kindness, when done with love, can create lasting memories and blessings. Ultimately, he calls for a life dedicated to meaningful contributions that enrich both our character and the world around us.

Transcript

"If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

"Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things!" Colossians 3:1-2

The smallest bark on life's tumultuous ocean

Will leave a track behind forevermore;

The lightest wave of influence, once in motion,

Extends and widens to the eternal shore.

We should be wary, then, who go before

A myriad yet to be; and we should take

Our bearing carefully, when breakers roar

And fearful tempests gather; one mistake

May wreck unnumbered barks that follow in our wake!

There are things which do not last. They may be beautiful to the eye--but in a moment they are gone; like the snowflake which falls on the water, it sparkles for an instant, and then vanishes, leaving no trace. There are many lives running through long days and years--which leave nothing to tell the story of their stay in the world. There are those who live a full lifetime and are busy all the while, and yet do nothing that will endure. There are even Christian people, Paul tells us, who build, too, on the only true foundation, Jesus Christ--and yet all of whose work will be burned up in the final testing. They build wood, hay, and stubble into the walls--instead of gold, silver, and precious stones. They will be saved themselves--but so as by fire--all their work being burned up.

An ancient legend says that an angel was permitted on one occasion to visit the earth. From a lofty mountain top, he looked down upon the cities and palaces and works of man. As he went away, he said, "All these people are spending their time in just building birds' nests!"

We are building birds' nests to be swept away in the floods--when we might be erecting palaces of immortal beauty to dwell in forever! Thus indeed must much of the best of our life and work in this world appear to the angels--who look down upon us from heaven and see things as they are!

It is unworthy of an immortal being to live thus--to spend a lifetime amid splendid opportunities, and yet leave nothing that will last! We are capable of doing things that will abide forever, and we should never be content to do anything that will not last. Nothing is worth while--which is not eternal, which will not permanently enrich our own character, which will not in some way make the world better, sweeter, happier, and which we cannot carry with us as treasure, into the eternal world. It is possible to so live--so that everything we do shall last!

"You know that your labor is not vain in the Lord," said Paul. We may, in all our busy life, lay only gold, silver, and precious stones on the walls; materials which will not be consumed nor tarnished in the fire that shall try every man's work, of what sort it is.

A man spends three score and ten years in humble Christian living. He makes no 'success' in the world, as men regard success. Yet all the while--he lives honestly and faithfully in his own place. While other men are fighting for position, scrambling for advancement, thinking only of themselves; he lives devoutly toward God, unselfishly toward men and diligently in the doing of all duty. When he dies he leaves nothing behind him--no money, no property. But there is another sphere in which results are rated not by dollars--but by moral and spiritual values. In this sphere--a cup of cold water given to a thirsty one, in the name of Christ, will count for more than the piling up of a fortune for one's self! In this sphere--the man whose hands appear empty--is rich and leaves to the world an enduring inheritance of blessing and good.

Charles Kingsley tells us that,

Not all who seem to fail, have failed indeed;

Not all who fail, have therefore worked in vain.

There is no failure for the good and wise.

What though your seed should fall by the wayside.

And the birds snatch it--yet the birds are fed,

Or they may bear it far across the tide

To give rich harvests after you are dead.

One of the most picturesque sights one sees in the country, is an old mill, with its water-wheel outside. The water fills the buckets, and all day long the wheel turns round and round in the sunshine. It seems to be toiling away laboriously enough, but uselessly. You see nothing that it accomplishes by its ceaseless motion. But its shaft runs through the wall, and out of sight within the mill, turns the stones which grind the wheat, and the bolts which prepare the flour that feeds many people.

Just so, there are human lives which, with all their unresting toil, seem to be doing nothing--and yet they project into the sphere of the unseen--and there they make benefit and good of incalculable value.

The secret of the work that lasts--is that it is done in the name of Christ, and that it is inspired by sincere love. What we do for ourselves--will not last. The fabric will crumble, however imposing it may be. He who writes his own name on his work--is doomed to disappointment. There is no immortality for vanity and self-seeking. The glory of self-conceit, is but a bubble that bursts and leaves only a bunch of froth. But what we do in love for Christ and for our fellow-men, will last forever!

One made a piece of costly embroidery, putting into it finest threads of gold and silver. Then the work was laid away for a time, and when it was looked at again--the whole delicate and beautiful fabric had been destroyed--nothing was left of it but the gold and silver threads. These were as bright as ever--in imperishable beauty.

Just so, the only threads in the web of a life which will endure--are the gold and silver threads which love for Christ and love for men put in.

If men only realized and remembered this--they would not spend so much of their time--in doing things that will not last! Even in our religious work, many of us seem to think that money is about the only thing that is worth giving. If we cannot put our name on the subscription paper, with a good sum attached, we think we are not doing anything. We need to be reminded continually, that He who has been immeasurably the world's greatest benefactor, gave no money--but gave instead love's service and sacrifice--He gave Himself!

Our capacity for usefulness, is not measured by the amount of money we have to bestow. The greatest gift we can give to any cause--is ourself. Indeed nothing really counts--but love. Paul tells us this. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love--I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love--I am nothing!" Human eloquence is nothing--unless love is in it; there is nothing in it that abides; it is only a pleasant noise whose music dies away in the air.

Paul says further, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love--I gain nothing!" Money is nothing in God's sight--if the giving of it is not inspired by love. The poor

may be fed--money will buy bread; but in the sphere of spiritual realities, no record is kept of even the most lavish giving of bread and clothing for charity, if love is not the inspiring motive. Love is life, and if love is lacking, the largest benefactions are only dead works.

There is nothing greater possible that we can do in this world--than to put love into a life where love is lacking. A great novelist relates of one of his characters, a nobleman, that when he walked over his estates, he carried acorns in his pocket, and when he came to a spot which seemed bare--he would plant one of them, so that the dreary place might be brightened. We are forever coming upon human lives which by reason of sorrow, failure or misfortune--are left bare and empty. If we carry always a heart full of love and cheer, we may drop the living seeds into these sad and lonely places, thus changing desert spots into bits of lovely gardens.

We do not begin to know what power even very little things have to put brightness and a blessing into dreary or empty lives--if love is in them. The memory of a kindly word stays oftentimes for years, in a heart to which it brought cheer and uplift. A flower sent to a darkened room in some time of sickness or sorrow--leaves a fragrance which abides ever afterwards. A note of sympathy with its word of comfort and love--is cherished as dearer than gold or gems, and its message is never forgotten. "Love never fails"--it never dies. The greatest deeds, without love--make no enduring record. But when love inspires them, the smallest ministries of kindness, leave imperishable memories in the lives which they help and bless.

It ought to be the deepest wish of every true heart--to leave in this world something which will last, which will not perish amid the wastes of time, which will live in blessing and good.

"Is the world better or worse, where I tread?

What have I done, in the years that are dead?

What have I left, in the way as I passed--

Foibles to perish--or blessings to last?"

Jesus said of Judas, that it would have been better for him--if he had never been born. Judas left a terrible curse in the world--instead of a blessing. That which he did, made infamy for him--instead of honor. No doubt the case of Judas was an extraordinary one--but there are countless others of whom the same is measurably true. It is a dreadful thing to miss a ministry of blessing in one's life, to be a tree of poisonous exhalation, like the fabled 'upas tree', instead of a tree planted by the streams of water, which bears its fruit in its season.

It is a sad thing to live in vain, to spend one's years in doing things that are not worth while, things that will perish! We should not be content to let a single day pass, in which we do not speak some gracious word or do a kindness that will add to the happiness, the hope, or the courage and strength of another life. Such ministries of love will redeem our days of toil and struggle from dreariness and earthliness, and make them radiant in God's eye and in the record they make for eternity!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/things-that-last/>

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