

Living A Useful Life.

Text: Acts 13:36

Suggested Hymns:

330, 387, 370, 290, 375

- 1) David Lived A Useful Life
- 2) Living A Useful Life of service
- 3) Serving Sacrificially
- 4) How About Us?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 13:36, ³⁶ *“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

David lived a life that was useful to his own generation in accordance with God’s purposes. This is what our text is telling us.

As normal people, we all want to live life at its best. However, not all people see eye to eye as to what makes for the best life, and the best way as to how to attain our goal.

The unjust steward mentioned in the Gospel Lesson¹ thought that life could be lived at its best by putting his master’s creditors under obligation to himself. He accomplished this by reducing the debt of each man without the knowledge and consent of his master. When dismissed, he would invite himself to their homes and expect them to house and feed him.

In this regard we find two types of people. The one type, we discover, sets out to get the most for themselves. These are selfish and self-centred people, who are always trying to get more than they give. Often they think that they are giving more than they get and live through the day pitying themselves.

The other type is made up of those who try by the grace of God to give the best that is in them in service to God and man. They feel that they are getting more out of life than they are putting in and want to show their appreciation to God in doing their best each day.

If we live only for this world, accumulating wealth that we may have a glorious time in luxury and ease, we will never be satisfied in this world. We will be chasing rainbows of promises, yet never find the pot of gold or those expected thrills. Either we grow old before our time or we become nervous wrecks, burning the candle of life at both ends.

As Christians we enrich our lives, making each day count by giving our best service to God and man. By the grace of God we enjoy a unique contentment. We may have much less to live on, but we have far more to live for.

Scripture emphasises that Christians live a truly useful life and consequently feel more satisfied. Jesus gave us the pattern when He says of Himself, in Mark 10:45, ... *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*. The royal road of life is a road of service. That service may be gruelling and a plaguing drudgery, but to escape this, Jesus says, we must do all for Him.

The motivating power must be a love for Jesus and His sacrificial cross. Each act must be an expression of appreciation to Jesus who has done so much for us. This gratitude desires to carry out the purposes of God. Daily we join Paul in his question, "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*"² This puts a blessing around each task and makes every chore a privilege because we do it for Christ.

Addressing his fellow Jews in the synagogue at Antioch, Paul summed up the activities of David, their national hero, by saying, "*David served his own generation according to the will of God.*" David lived a useful life in harmony with the purposes of God. Let us consider this life. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. David Lived A Useful Life

David's life is summed up in one word, serve. To many people of our day this word has become obsolete. Too often we are holding out our hand as we stand in the receiving line of life, expecting others to do the hard things so that we may live at ease.

David rendered useful service in four occupations. As a youth he was a shepherd. In this field he did much that was ordinary and common-place and strenuous. Long hours had to be spent in the heat of the day looking for pasture for the sheep, water for the thirsting animals, protection from snakes and wild

animals. No applause came from the sidelines, and no medals were given for faithful service.

Yet this task had its compensations. He saw the beauty of God's creation. He practiced throwing stones with his sling to keep the sheep together and the wolves away from the fold. By doing these non-glamorous chores in his daily routine he served to the best of his ability.

As a young man he became a soldier. Here he became a hero. It took courage to face the enemy and go to the battle-front. At this time he discovered how valuable was his training in the use of the sling. He could sling stones with an amazing marksmanship that won the victory for him over the giant Goliath.

As soldier he tasted the joys of victory. There were thunderous applause and triumphant parades. As soldier he enjoyed the glamour of hero admiration and splendid service rendered to his country and its people.

In due time David became king. To rule successfully required tact, wisdom, judgment, sympathetic understanding of the nation's needs, and courage. However, pomp and grandeur, honour and praise, were the fruit of such faithful service to his country.

Still more, his every wish was gratified. Servants and slaves, officials and generals, did his bidding. When he fell asleep he was laid to rest with the fathers. The popular consensus of man, and the appraisal of the Lord God is recorded in Scripture with these words, He "*served his own generation by the will of God.*"

However, David left to all mankind a heritage which makes him to this day, one of the most loved men of all time. He was an inspired poet. He gave us by inspiration of God the immortal Shepherd Psalm. A total of 82 psalms of the Bible are attributed to him, and these have made him one of the best-known men in history.

Millions of people in each generation turn to Psalm 23 and are comforted, strengthened in their faith, and given new courage as they face the sorrows of death. Truly, his was a useful life!

2. Living A Useful Life Of Service

This path of service is open to all Christians. Many of our personal worries and much of our discontent would disappear if we made a greater effort to do something worthwhile for others. Sitting down and feeling sorry for oneself never improves a bad situation.

If we honestly face our problems and troubles and endeavour to correct them we can rise above them. Above all, we must heed the gracious invitation of Jesus and come to Him. He makes every burden lighter and puts our mind at ease as we hide in Him, the Rock of Ages.

This holds true in the home, in our civic and social contacts, both in our workday and in our church life. By looking for an opportunity to be helpful, putting others at ease, smoothing out the irritating situations, we will be of real service to our generation. The street on which we live should be a better street because we, as God's people are living there.

This service of useful living can be satisfactory only if it is done according to the will of God, or "*in accordance with God's purposes.*" With Paul we should ask daily, "***Lord, what will You have me to do?***"

Note that David received the commendation of God because he carried out the Lord's purposes. For this reason God says in Acts 13:22, '***I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.***'

How do we live life at its best in a useful service? Firstly, by seeking to glorify God in all that we do. Paul says in Colossians 3:17, '***And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*** Too often we are unconcerned as to what God thinks of us and what influence our actions and words bear on our fellowmen. Our conduct may be so negative that not even our neighbours are suspicious that we are Christians.

However, if our life is to be useful in the community and if we are to be helpful and cooperative, we must live positively. The people we meet must not fail to note that God's presence is in our lives and that we belong to Jesus. We must act like Christians.

Secondly, God's purposes are carried out in our lives as we appreciate God and all He has done for us through Christ. This we do by realising and admitting

that God for Jesus' sake opens His hands daily to supply us with all that we need from day to day.

God knows that we grow hungry every day. We also need clothing and shelter regularly. God gives us the opportunity to make a living and thus provides us with the necessities of life. Still more, God opens His heart to draw us to Himself with His forgiving love.

So great was God's compassion for sinful man that He sent His Son into this world of sinners to reconcile us to Himself through Jesus' cross. Because Jesus went to Calvary and died there, we can come just as we are, sob out the story of our many transgressions, and find a forgiving Father, who never closes the door on anyone who comes.

We truly must be grateful that we have such a gracious Father and therefore live lives pleasing to our Lord God. This puts a wonderful blessing on our useful activities.

We are truly appreciative to God for His many promises to guide and direct our lives as we go through this hazardous world. Danger lurks on all sides. None of us know whether we will return safely to our home in the evening hours. Besetting us on all sides are temptations to sin, to err, and to stray into indifference.

We need God to keep us in His grace, to spare us from the many ills of life, and to strengthen us in our faith. With grateful hearts we should come to His throne of mercy each day. Living trustingly in His presence we will be cheerful and we will sing to the Lord wherever we are.

By faith in Christ and His redemption we love Him who loved us first. This love is expressed in service which makes the day brighter for those who are helped by us. Such service as the fruit of faith puts a blessing in our lives. We come to the end of the day knowing that we have been useful and helpful to those whom we have met on the streets of struggle and pain.

3. Serving Sacrificially

God's purposes are carried out in our lives by serving sacrificially. In being useful and helpful we must put ourselves out for others. This means that we must give up some of our precious time which we would like to use for ourselves. We

must use some of our treasured energy. We may even have to spend money which we have saved carefully, on people who were careless in the use of their income.

However, God may be using us to answer some prayers made by such people who come to Him with repentant tears. Being helpful, we shall find genuine joy and satisfaction in the deed whatever it may be. This joy of sacrificial service does not look for praise and recognition. We serve for the Lord's sake, who has redeemed us, and we want Him to use us to His glory as we pass through this world of trouble and sorrow.

Easing the burdens of the weary, encouraging the disheartened, and protecting the wronged and hurt, and doing it all in the power of faith, puts a blessing around our lives and makes us feel that we have not lived in vain.

Once more God's purposes are carried out in our lives by serving backstage, where the details and the chores are done unseen and unsung. In the parable of the talents Jesus praises those who have been faithful in the few things, the little things. In a hundred years from today only a few of our generation will be known by name.

However, what is important today is that many little things are done to make life run smoothly. The streets are kept clean; the city's water system is kept functioning; the weeds are kept down; the sick are bathed; the children are taught to live decently; food laws are enacted; and traffic laws are enforced.

Important in each day are the thousand and one little things, done conscientiously and down to the minutest detail. Most of us are serving in these out-of-the-limelight corners of life, where few, if any, recognise and appreciate what we do.

Jesus stresses, however, the importance of doing well these seemingly insignificant chores of the day. If we do these unfailingly, we have His blessings.

At one time Jesus said to the people who thought that only the glamorous deserves mentioning, ***“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”***³

In every walk of life we Christians can carry out God's purposes and receive His commendation "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" Blessed indeed are we if we receive this recognition from our Lord God. "*He served his generation well*" — this puts a blessing on our useful and God-pleasing life.

4. How About Us?

Now the all-important question to you and me: *How are we serving our generation?* Are we living a self-centred and selfish life, very little concerned as to what happens to those who live down the street? Are we smugly enjoying life, seldom offering a helping hand to those who travel with us "*from Jerusalem to Jericho,*" where thieves rob and kill?

Or does our love for Christ compel us to live sacrificially, going through the day, bending over broken lives, battered down by sin and wickedness and in need of help to save their souls? What are we doing to make a lonely life brighter, a drab sickroom more cheerful? Do we take time out to speak a word of encouragement and hope to those who are burdened with heartaches, protracted illness, or disappointment?

Such useful lives we shall live only if we stand beneath the cross of Jesus and look at what He has done for us. He has saved us, giving us peace of mind and the assurance that He does not want us to perish. He wants us to travel that narrow way of life with hope.

Each day Jesus asks us to come to Him, to hide in His sacred wounds, and to live trustingly. Enjoying such help from His pierced hands should fill us with the keen desire to be helpful to others, doing good to all people, especially those who are of the household of faith.

He saved us from the curse and judgment of sin. That is the reason He hangs on that accursed tree. He is wounded for our transgressions, for His Father laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Having been forgiven and made heirs of heaven by faith, we want to share with others the glory of salvation.

Today let each one of us resolve to start this week with the determined effort to live a more useful life.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,⁴

Give me a faithful heart,

Likeness to Thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wand'rer sought and won,
Something for Thee. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 16:1-9

² Acts 9:6

³ Matthew 10:42

⁴ Hymn 370 v 3