The Confession of a Man Who Failed

1 Kings 20:38-40

38 So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face.
39 And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.
40 And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it.

The Text

• Our text contains a parable that is acted out by a certain prophet.
  o The parable is intended to be a message to King Ahab.
    ▪ The prophet is issuing a rebuke to the king for his leniency in dealing with Benhadad.
  o God delivered his enemy to him in battle and the Lord had appointed Benhadad to utter destruction.
    ▪ But Ahab struck a bargain with Benhadad and spared him.
  o It is his failure at this simple task that has caused God to reject him.
    ▪ The message of the prophet is that God will require Ahab’s life for Benhadad’s life.
      • That is the message that is being conveyed in the parable.
• This whole passage is interesting to me because it is not unlike the prophet who confronted David after his sin with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband.
  o In both instances the prophets present a parable and allow the kings to pass their own judgments on themselves – which both Ahab and David did.
• However, it is not my desire this evening to focus on Ahab and Benhadad.
  o Rather, I would like to focus on the parable and how it relates to us here tonight.
• For the parable contains the confession of a man who failed.
  o We hear, from his own lips, the story of his failure.
    ▪ I was in the middle of the battle, he says, when a man brought to me a prisoner and gave me a command – Keep this prisoner!
      • Don’t let him escape.
      • He’s a high value prisoner.
      • Guard him with your life, because if he escapes, it will be your life for his.
    ▪ At that moment the entire battle changes for this soldier.
• It’s no longer about taking ground from the enemy.
• His focus is no longer the attack or defense of a position.
• He has but one chore, a single task, and it should encompass everything that he does.
  o His only job is the security of his prisoner.
  o His only job is to make sure that the prisoner doesn’t escape.

- I can just imagine how that transforms the mindset of the soldier.
  • He disregards the cries to advance, he stops seeking out his foe, instead he turns towards the rear of the battle, retreating back into friendly lines.
- He doesn’t do this out of cowardice, but rather out of an understanding of the gravity of the situation.
  • He can’t afford to linger in the front lines of the battle, he can’t afford to spend his next few moments in a place where he might be overwhelmed by the enemy.
  • Because he now has a prisoner and the life of that prisoner is as his own.
- He has a singular charge – to make sure that the prisoner doesn’t escape.
  • Whether his army prevails or is defeated, no longer matters to him.
- The idea of doing his part to ensure a victory no longer holds any sway over him,
  • instead he heads back to the rear,
  • back to the supply depots,
  • back where he will be surrounded by friendly forces
  • because that is the safest place to keep his prisoner.
- When the prisoner was surrendered to him, his life was transformed.
  • Up until that time there had been many worries and many concerns, there were a lot of things that he may have been responsible for.
  • But now, it all boils down to one command, one simple thing has been required of him – keep the prisoner!
- It would seem that once he passed back through his own lines,
  • once he brought his prisoner away from the fighting and away from the din and roar of battle,
  • the task of securing him and keeping him would be greatly simplified.
- However, by his own confession, it wasn’t quite that certain.
  • You see, somewhere along the way, his mind wandered from his task and he got caught up in some OTHER things.
  • I don’t know what they were, I only know, from his own confession, that he suddenly found himself busy.
Not the business of battle, not the life and death struggle that he had been busy with before he was given charge of his prisoner.
  ▪ Just busy here and there.
    • Maybe the cook needed him to run an errand.
    • Maybe the medic sent him to fetch supplies.
    • Maybe the quartermaster sent him to check on the progress of the guys making fresh arrows.
  • Whatever it was, we can know two things about it:
    o First, it was insignificant – nothing mattered more than the job he had been given.
    o Secondly, it so distracted him that he completely lost track of his prisoner.
      ▪ By his own confession:
        • As thy servant was busy here and there, he was – gone!
        ▪ The prisoner escaped!
  • And with those words, the man sentences himself to death.
    o It is the confession of a man who failed.
      ▪ I was given a task he says.
      ▪ I understood the gravity of the task.
        • I wasn’t overwhelmed by my enemies,
        • a troop of soldiers did not take him from me,
        • I wasn’t ambushed in the dark or attacked as I slept.
    o But I let myself become distracted by some things that are so insignificant that I can’t even name them.
      ▪ I was just busy here and there.
        • And I totally lost track of my charge.
        • I totally lost track of my mission.
    o It didn’t even occur to me, in the midst of my business, to take care of the important task that I had been given.
      ▪ And, as I was taken by the trivial, as I was distracted by the insignificant, my prisoner escaped!
        • What a tragic confession, what a sad situation.
      ▪ He had but one task, he had but one thing to worry about but somehow, he allowed himself to get involved in so many other things that he was blinded to his true purpose.
        • And, though the myriad of minor things got done, he failed in the one thing that really mattered in his life.
    • I don’t know about you but the parable spoke to my life as I read it this week.
      o How many times do we let ourselves get so bogged down in the inconsequential things in this life to the extent that we let it distract us from our true purpose in life?
        ▪ How many times do we allow the calling of God in our lives,
        • our mission of reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ,
• to become subordinated by the meaningless petty pursuits of this carnal life?

• How many will stand in judgment one day and join their voice with the soldier from the parable, and say,
  o “I just... I just got busy. I was busy here and there.
  o They were minor things. They didn't really matter.
  o I just got busy. And while I was busy, my heart drifted away from God.
  o While I was busy I grew cold in my soul.
  o While I was busy I lost out with God.
  o I didn’t even realize it at the time.
    ▪ I was still going through the routine, I was still attending church, singing the songs, living the life.
  o I just got so burdened down,
    ▪ I just got busy here and there and before I knew it the Holy Ghost was gone!”

• I wonder, tonight, if that’s the story of the five foolish virgins?
  o I meant to get some more oil.
    ▪ I knew it was the most important thing in my life.
    • But I just got so involved, I just got so busy.
  o I was being pulled this way and that,
    ▪ I had to run an errand here and do a job over there
    • and before I knew it all the shops were closed and it was too late to buy oil.
  o I comforted myself with the hope that maybe I had enough, maybe he wouldn't come tonight.
    ▪ And I was relived the next day, when the sun rose and the bridegroom hadn’t returned.
  o I cautioned myself not to forget that I needed to buy oil today.
    ▪ But then it happened again.
      • Life gets so busy, everything gets so hectic.
  o I was busy here and there just taking care of the mundane tasks of this life and, once again, I failed to buy the oil.
    ▪ It was that way day after day after day and it was fine because he never returned.
  o But then on that fateful night when the cry came, the bridegroom cometh, I realized that I had waited too late.
    ▪ I was too busy here and there and in the midst of it all I let my oil run dry!

• I want to preach to somebody tonight that you need to stop for moment and take stock of your life – nothing is more important than the condition of your soul!
  o Nothing is more important than maintaining oil in your lamp!
    ▪ Don't let yourself get so caught up in running here and there, so busy about the trivial affairs of this life, that you miss out with God!
Nothing, this evening is as important as your walk with God,
- nothing matters so much as fulfilling his purpose for your life.
- There is nothing in this world that matters more that making heaven your home.

Yet I am so amazed by the incredible potential of believers to become so distracted by the inconsequential affairs of this life until we lose sight of our true purpose for living!
- We need to stop and take stock.
  - It is so easy to get caught up in the mundane affairs of life.
    - The cost of simply living causes us to rise each day and run off to a job.
      - There are bills to pay, wants to fulfill and dreams to achieve.
    - We push ourselves as hard as we can, we involve ourselves in so many different things.
  - Each of us is wrapped up in this life, fully invested in a myriad of pursuits...

But let me sound a note of caution tonight!
- It would be easy to get so caught up in the extreme “busy”ness of all of these things that we lose sight of a higher purpose.
  - I don’t want any of you to lose your grasp on the high calling of God or to lose your focus on his purpose for your life as you find yourself busy here and there.

Heed my warning:
- There will be those that will stand at the seat of judgment and seek to defend themselves.
  - They will say but we prophesied in your name,
  - we cast out devils in your name,
  - we worked many wonders in your name.
    - But the Lord will turn them away on that day, saying depart from me – I never knew you!
- There will be those who once lived for him,
  - once walked with him,
  - and were once mightily used by him
    - that will have no defense on that day except that they got busy here and there
    - and in the midst of their busy life they lost out with God!
- Don’t let yourself be numbered among that crowd!
  - Safeguard your soul.
    - There is a clarion call going forth tonight to reorder your priorities to make sure that you don’t lose your focus on the better things as you are forced to deal with the trivial things that this life throws at you.
- Brother T.F. Tenney used to say that “The main thing is keeping the main thing the main thing!”
While I know it sounds simple and maybe even a bit trivial tonight, that is indeed the point of this message.

- We need to be vigilant in our lives to keep the main thing the main thing.
  - Lest we find ourselves so busy here and there that the thing slips away from us!

- I am reminded of Samson.
  - Samson was born for a purpose – he was anointed of God for a cause.
    - He had great potential in his life, He had a great calling of God upon him.
  - But he was too distracted by the temporal things to fulfill that potential.
    - He would get busy here and there and he would lose track of the thing for which he was born!
      - Samson was constantly falling short of his destiny because of his distractions!
  - However, when Samson’s enemies sought to destroy him they unknowingly did him a favor.
    - With a hot poker they put out his eyes, and, without even realizing it they blinded him to the distractions that had so hindered him.
  - Samson was chained to a grinding wheel and forced to labor as an animal might labor, grinding grain to the amusement of his captors.
    - However, it was there in that prison house where God managed to place Sampson in a place that he had never been before.
      - Blinded to distractions and chained to a burden, his mind began to contemplate his reason for living.
  - And in the cruel darkness that was thrust upon him, Sampson achieved a clarity of vision that he had never had in this life.
    - All of a sudden he could see clearly the higher purpose of his life.
    - All of a sudden he was robbed of the “busy”ness of here and there
      - and was forced to focus on his singular purpose in this life.
  - And one day, as he ground at the wheel, a breeze wafted through the millhouse and Samson felt his hair begin to blow in the breeze.
    - In that instant he realized that he was being given a second chance.
  - With no more distractions to turn him aside, he began to seek out the opportunity that God would surely give him.
    - And, on that fateful day that they paraded him before all the Philistine royalty and sought to humiliate him for sport,
Samson recovered the thing that had gotten away from him while he was busy here and there.

- With a mighty shout and a surge of anointing he brought the whole house down in a victorious display of strength.

- The Philistines were not prepared to deal with a Samson that was no longer distracted.
  - Likewise, tonight, Hell isn't capable of dealing with a church that would tear itself away from the distractions and renew its focus on the true purpose for being here.
    - If somehow we could shut out all the voices vying for our attention
    - and close out the busy work that needs to be done just long enough to receive from the master,
      - I believe that he wants to empower you tonight to achieve his purpose in your life.

Close

- I refuse to stand in eternity next to the soldier in the parable and vocalize the epitaph of a wasted life, “I was busy here and there and the thing just got away from me.”
  - Rather, I have determined that, no matter what it takes, I’m going to keep my focus on the main thing in my life.
    - I know that I will never escape the “busy”ness of life, I realize that there will always be things that need to be done here and there.
    - But I have determined, as I must determine every day, not to let those trivial things distract me from a higher purpose in my life.

- If we, as a church, would make that same commitment together, we would see great things happen in Lake City!
  - I wonder tonight if there is anyone that is willing to take a step back and recognize that, if you aren’t careful, you will become overwhelmed with the “busy”ness that is here and there.
    - I wonder if you would be willing to make a fresh commitment not to lose sight of the most important thing in this life as you wrestle with the mundane and trifling tings that life thrusts upon you.
    - Let us conclude together that nothing matters more than making heaven our home, nothing is as important as reaching the lost, nothing is as imperative as God’s call on our lives!
    - Let us determine together to press toward the mark of a high calling!