

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

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SERMON FIVE

BEAUTIFUL FAILURES

By

Dr. Wallace Bassett,

Pastor, Cliff Temple Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas

“And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein, and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink” (Exodus 2:3).

There is a proverb: “Nothing succeeds like success.” This proverb is true in the sense it was used; but should be qualified by the use of other statements, viz.: “Nothing fails like success,” and “Nothing succeeds like a failure.”

The history of this world may be read by a careful study of the series of failures that form steps in the world’s progress. Walking is a series of falls, so we are told. The child first falls, then learns to catch himself as he falls, and thus takes a step. Walking is a continuous fall. The failure of the Sahara desert makes fertile other lands for hundreds of miles around. The fertility of the valleys of the Nile, Jordan and Mississippi is due to the lack of fertility of the hill country near these rivers.

In our text we see a failure, that we might name a beautiful failure. The Pharaoh had said it, and it must be so. All the male babies of the Hebrews must be slain; they were multiplying too swiftly. While this edict was being carried into effect, a beautiful boy baby was born to slave parents in the land of Goshen. “What shall we do with him?” was a question often on the lips of loved ones. “Hide him,” was the only reply. This was done for a few weeks, but every day brought new fears and anxieties. The rising sun, the shining stars, the neighbors who smiled a knowing smile, the taskmaster walking continuously by the hut, all seemed to say, “You have failed.”

One evening a bent slave-father entered the humble home with an alarmed countenance, for he had heard the babe’s voice from some distance on his way from his work. That night was a sleepless night in the cabin. A bright little girl cried nearly all night, while a troubled father walked the floor, and a broken-hearted mother held a beautiful boy baby closer to her bosom.

Next morning a son left a home. This is always a sad thing. But in this instance it was very sad, for the son was only three months old. He left in a boat, launched by the parents, conscious of their failure. Ships have sailed many waters since, and history-making have been the voyages they made. But never Mayflower or Titanic, Lusitania or Spanish Armada ever meant so much for coming generations, as this little boat sent out from the harbor of parental failure, lined with a mother's love. For this boat was floating on the tides of the providences of God. It was a part of His eternal plans, and while it signified failure on one hand, it was a beautiful failure.

Looking at this passage, we can see how failures become beautiful.

I. Failures are beautiful when they are stepping-stones to higher things

Had the parents of Moses succeeded in hiding him, what would have been the result? Only another slave boy to grow to manhood and perish under the taskmaster's lash. But failure meant the opening of a gate into a higher life.

The world's possessions are purchased at the price of a failure.

- We have automobiles, because horses have failed to travel fast enough.
- We have electric lights, because the tallow candle failed to give enough illumination.
- We have telephones, because the human voice failed to carry far enough.
- We have graphophone records, because the human voice failed to speak after death.

Our language is the monument to thousands of failures, for every time present words fail to express the shade of meaning intended other words have been coined until our language has been builded like a house a little at a time.

“Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and fail it abideth alone.”

II. Failures are beautiful when they are discoveries of the plan of God

God works by a plan, whether it is making a leaf, a tree, a feather, a life, or a universe. This plan includes both successes and failures. The failures are just as necessary to discover His plan as the successes are.

As we look back through the ages, the world can see now that the greatest thing the parents of Moses ever did was to fail in keeping him hidden. It was the greatest, because it helped to discover God's great plan.

Paul slept at Troas, because he had failed to go to the northeast on a missionary tour. The Spirit of God made him fail to go. The Spirit baffled him. But, thinking of the failure, he fell asleep and dreamed he saw a man from Macedonia calling for help. He carried out the dream, and the Gospel was first preached in Europe, because a man failed.

Joseph's life was a series of failures.

- He failed to get on with his brothers in the home.
- He failed to get back home, when he went to see them in the fields.
- He failed to make a good impression on Potiphar.
- He failed to get out of prison for two years, after he befriended the butler.

But they were all beautiful failures, for they helped to discover God's plan for the world.

- Israel failed in Egypt, and her sons were made into slaves.
- Lazarus's health failed and he died;
- Luther failed and was thrown in prison;
- John Bunyan failed and was jailed;
- Paul failed and was imprisoned in Caesarea and later, Rome.

But all these were beautiful failures, since they helped to discover God's plans.

Judson first planned to enter India as a missionary. The governor of the East India Company ordered him out and advised him to return to America. He obeyed his order, but did not take his advice. He went to Burma. There he laid the foundation for the great missionary work, and in Burma we find the largest church in the world.

III. Failures are beautiful when they help us to discover ourselves

A life of continuous success does not reveal his real self to any man. Had this failure of our text not been, the world never would have known Moses. Like the chemical on the photo paper brings out the pictures, so failures in life bring out weak points and strong points.

- Peter had to fail to walk the waters before he appreciated his weakness and Christ's Strength.
- Goldsmith had to fail to have money to pay his board bill before Johnson searched through his papers and found the manuscript of Vicar of Wakefield.
- Poe's poverty was a "spur to prick the sides of his intent" and drive him to labor.

So with Millet, the painter of French peasant life, and Sir Walter Scott, the author of the Waverly novels. Whistler, the great artist, who painted the pictures so often seen on Mothers' Day, planned to be a soldier. He went to West Point, and failed in Chemistry. He said if silicon had been a gas he would have been a Major General. Beautiful failure. Edgar Allan Poe, perhaps America's greatest poet, also went to West Point and failed. He then turned his attention to poetry. Phillips Brooks first planned to be a teacher. Failing in this he was greatly depressed, so much so, that his father wrote he refused to see anyone. Not making a teacher, he turned his attention to the ministry and became one of the greatest preachers in all time. Sir Walter Scott first wanted to be a poet. He wrote some poetry until he read Byron's poems and then quit writing poetry.

He said, "Byron hits the mark where I don't even pretend to fledge my arrows." Failing as a poet, he turned his attention to fiction. So humbled he wrote his first novel anonymously. But as a result of his failure as a poet he became England's greatest novelist.

Lincoln failed as a country storekeeper; but suppose he had succeeded? Why, many great things of this great soul would have remained undiscovered. I asked a very wealthy man why he worked so hard. He said it was to give his son a chance. Such a mistake, for, if he gives his son the chance he had, he ought to lose all he has accumulated. A young man once said that the greatest day in his life was the day in college he got the message his father's factory had burned and that he was a poor boy.

IV. Failures are beautiful when they develop sympathy in us

If continuous success crowns our efforts we become unsympathetic and unsymmetrical in character. "All sunshine makes a desert" is an old Arab proverb. Occasional failure makes a Washington. Uninterrupted success makes a Napoleon. They pull green peaches from the trees in East Texas in order to have fewer peaches, but bigger and better ones. So our lives are sweetened and enlarged by having some things taken from us. "Character is the fine art of giving up." The spark is brought from the flint by friction. So the spark of sympathy is struck from the life of Milton, Dante, Homer, George Matheson, and others by the failure of eyesight.

V. Failures are beautiful when they bring us to God

If you should ask Jairus what one asset he ever possessed that in later life he valued most highly, I think he would say it was the failure of his daughter's health and her death, for these things, so sad at the time, brought the Master into his home.

Had you in later life talked to the Prodigal Son and asked him what possessions stood out as of most value in his past, I think he would have said, "Husks, hunger, dirt, rags, and a failure to make a 'go' of it in the far country; for these things brought me to my father's house where were a ring and a robe and a feast."

Ask the starving widow what were the greatest things she ever had and she would immediately answer, "An empty meal barrel and a failing oil cruse," for these are the things that commended her to the Prophet of God. So your greatest possession is what you do not have in insufficiency without God. Anything is beautiful if it makes us see Him.

Conclusion

The most colossal failure in the history of the world is that of Jesus Christ. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. He was in the midst of homes and yet had no place to lay His head. He was the way, the truth and the life, and yet He laid down His life. What a failure! But how beautiful the failure, for in the cross of Christ we glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time. In Story's lines:

"Speak history! Who are life's victors?
Unroll long annals and say,
Are those who the world call the victors—
who won the success of a day?"

The Martyrs or Nero?
The Spartans who fell at Thermopylae's trust or
the Persians and Xerxes?
His judges or Socrates, Pilate or Christ?"

Dr. Wallace Bassett was born at Middle Grove, Mo., Dec. 31, 1884. Education, LaGrange, Mo. College, Kansas City Seminary, Newton Theological Institute. Ordained, July, 1905. Pastorates: Sulphur Springs, Tex., 4 years; Amarillo, Tex., 3 years; Cliff Temple Baptist Church, Dallas, Tex., March 1, 1918 to date. Preacher, Southern Baptist Convention sermon, 1927. Preacher, Texas Baptist Convention sermon, 1920. Author, "*Beatific Verities*."

Cliff Temple Baptist Church, Dallas, has 5,196 members (third largest in Southern Baptist Convention). Since Mar. 1, 1918, under Dr. Bassett's ministry, there have been 8,295 additions. Total contributions have been \$1,230,488.27. Total value of all their church property is \$375,000 and they will build a new auditorium soon (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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