

ABC's of SALVATION

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

UNENVIABLE POSITIONS

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12, 13).

THE last phrase of verse 12, **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,”** is often taken out of its context in an attempt to teach that a sinner must work for his salvation, and, when he receives it, he must continue to work in order to keep from losing it. A careful reading of the text shows that it is addressed to saints, who are exhorted to work out that which has already been worked in by God. In my old school teaching days I never sent a pupil to the blackboard to work out a problem unless I was reasonably sure that it had first been worked into him.

In this chapter we call your attention to some of the saints of God who failed to do this on certain occasions and came under the chastening hand of the heavenly Father.

I. Lot—a Discredited Saint

Read all of Genesis 19.

The story of Lot's backsliding covered a period of years. It began back in Genesis 13:10 when he coveted the well-watered plain of Jordan. After he received this, he pitched his tent toward Sodom, then moved into Sodom, and finally became mixed in the politics of that city and took office therein. To read the record of this backslidden man makes it seem almost paradoxical to read in the New Testament of **“just Lot . . . that righteous man”** (II Peter 2:7, 8), but this is the inspired record and we must leave it there.

But back to the context. We find his home was so worldly that the angelic messengers preferred to sleep in the street rather than in his home, and accepted his invitation only after much persuasion. When Lot was finally awakened to the sense of the impending doom, he became a preacher of coming judgment to his own household, but his words were only an echo of mockery to those who knew him best.

HIS LIFE HAD DISCREDITED HIS TESTIMONY.

II. Elimelech—a Backslidden Saint

Read all of Ruth 1.

This scene took place during a famine “**in the days when the judges ruled.**” No doubt this very famine had been sent by God to turn the hearts of Israel back to Himself.

In Bethlehem-judah (*house of bread*) lived a man named Elimelech (*God is my King*), whose wife was named Naomi (*pleasantness*). They had two sons—Mahlon and Chilion. Instead of accepting the chastening as being sent from God for their good, this family, with this wealth of names, moved down into Moab to find bread. The boys soon married Moabitish girls—a thing disallowed by God (Deuteronomy 23:3; Nehemiah 13:1).

The price paid for all this was terrible. Elimelech died; the two sons died; and the place where they expected to find bread became the graveyard of the husband and two sons. Naomi (*pleasantness*), who changed her name to Marah (*bitterness*), was left in a heathen land with two daughters-in-law. That chastening had not had the desired effect on her is shown by her advice to the daughters-in-law to go back to their heathen homes and heathen gods (See Hebrews 12:11).

Backsliding is a process rather than an event.

Its beginning took place years before as indicated in the naming of the two sons, Mahlon (sickness) and Chilion (wasting). Instead of having faith in God and giving them names with an “El” ending, as other great parents in Israel did, they gave them these names. When faith was gone, courage vanished, and Moab was the sad ending.

Many a time during my years of ministry, I heard words like these, “Pastor, we are sorry to have to leave the church, especially because of our children, but we are moving to X . . . ; we can make so much more money there.” I watched some of these moves. Spiritually, they seemed to have been as disastrous as the move of Elimelech. Just as I was closing a pastorate of nearly nineteen years, I received a letter from a mother in which she stated that the family had discussed many times the financial gains to be derived in a move from that city, but the influence of the church upon the children had always caused them to stay. Needless to say, I filed that letter with my keepsakes.

Elimelech and family paid the price for backsliding.

III. David—a hazy Saint

Read all of II Samuel 11.

There seems to be no extenuating circumstances in this case whatsoever. David, the king, should have been either at the head of the army in battle or on the throne directing the affairs of state. Instead he had been lolling on his bed in the daytime (II Samuel 11:2).

The story of adultery and murder which follows is one of the blackest pages in divine revelation. That it is recorded concerning the man of whom it is written later, “**A man after God’s own heart,**” shows that God writes the history of man as it is. He never glosses over man’s sins, regardless of who he may be.

This sin made David a broken man. It cost him hours of tears and years of sorrow, anxiety, and trouble, for “**the sword never departed from his house.**” How the enemy uses lazy saints!

There is many a professed Christian who would bitterly resent being called “lazy,” who will spend hours in gossip over a phone and yet never spend an hour in personal evangelism. In my years of ministry I have known such. They would not murder or commit a shocking sin of the flesh, yet would roll under their tongues, as a sweet morsel, the foul, slander of other saints and commit the crime of murder of character. Spiritual laziness is a terrible crime!

David was lazy for a day and paid for it the remainder of his life.

IV. An Unnamed, Silenced Saint

Read all of I Kings 13.

God sent an unnamed prophet from Judah to Israel to testify against Jeroboam’s idolatrous altar. His instructions from the Lord were very clear and definite, “**Eat no bread nor drink water there nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest.**”

After fulfilling his mission, this prophet started upon his return trip. He was followed and overtaken by a prophet in Israel who persuaded him that he had later word by an angel, and that he should return and eat with him, which he did.

The unnamed prophet should have doubted immediately this other prophet’s word by the very fact that the latter was not used by God in his own country to testify against Jeroboam’s idolatry. But he accepted the word of this prophet in Israel and rejected the definite word of God. His successors are legion! For his disobedience, he was killed by a lion on his return trip. His testimony was silenced because he listened to a discredited prophet who claimed to have a later revelation. Beware of all such!

It is no uncommon thing for a pastor to be told by some member, “The Lord told me this, and the Lord told me that,” and very often this “added revelation” is contrary to the Word of God, and most frequently given by those whose testimony is so discredited in their own neighborhood that they never lead any of their neighbors to a saving knowledge of Christ.

V. Elijah—A Discouraged Saint

Read I Kings 19:1-18.

The preceding chapter (I Kings 18) is one of the mountain peaks in the triumph of faith.

For irony, drama, tension, excitement, power, and victory, we know of no chapter packed so full.

There is not a dull line in it. But what an anticlimax is found in chapter 19! Here we find the victorious prophet in mad flight from one woman, and this following the day of his mighty victory—a day, when the Lord, through him, conquered eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the groves. After miles and miles of flight, the old prophet fell under a tree and prayed that he might die. What was the cause of this collapse? No doubt there are extenuating circumstances here. We must remember that **“Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are”** (James 5:17). The nervous strain of the preceding days must have been tremendous. No doubt loneliness entered into the scene. Many a good soldier, a hero in the heat of battle, has been unable to stand the loneliness of picket duty. Then, too, he was meeting a different kind of foe.

In Proverbs 21:19 it is written, **“It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.”** Whether or not that Elijah had read this, one thing is true, he started for the wilderness. No doubt the main reason for this sad debacle is the fact that he got his eyes off God and on his circumstances.

The counterpart of this episode has been written time and time again in church history. It is no uncommon thing to find some domineering, self-seeking, unspiritual woman directing the affairs of a church, and the man, whom the Holy Ghost had made the overseer (Acts 20:28), cringing under her directions.

VI. Jonah—A Disobedient Saint

Read Jonah 1, 2.

God commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh. He promptly resigned his commission and started for Tarshish instead. He went down to Joppa and found a boat ready to sail to Tarshish. The devil always has an automobile at the door for the convenience of the saint who resigns his God-given commission. But note the language **“So he paid the fare thereof and went down into it.”**

The disobedient saint on the devil’s boat always pays the fare and is always on the way down.

Again there may have been some extenuating circumstances in this case. It may have seemed a patriotic duty on the part of Jonah to avoid the sparing of such a terrible military power that was threatening the existence of his own beloved country. The context seems to support this view, for after the city was spared Jonah besought the Lord to take his life. He seemed not to want to see the consequences which would follow. But be this as it may, there is no excuse for the saints of God in this dispensation for not fulfilling the commission God has put into their hands. The early church, in the face of bitter persecution, **“went everywhere preaching the word”** (Acts 8:4).

Today, instead of professing Christians going everywhere preaching the word, it is most difficult to get them even to listen to the preaching of the word. The work of the saints is to do **“the work of the ministry”** (Ephesians 4:12). It would seem that most of the saints, like Jonah, have resigned and gone down into the ship and are fast asleep.

Do not be too hard on Jonah until you have made a prayerful self-examination of how you are using the commission God has put into your hands.

VII. Peter—A Miserable Saint

Read John 18:15-18.

These verses record the sad story of the saint who had said a few hours before “**Although all shall be offended, yet will not I**” (Mark 14:29). Now he is warming at fires of the enemies of Christ. How tragic but true! Few indeed have been the true pastors who have not seen this over and over again. We have seen men and women make a noble confession, work, sacrifice, and stand true for months and even years, then become “**offended**” (Mark 14:27), then follow “**afar off**” (Matthew 26:58), and finally warm at the fires of the enemies of Christ by joining some modernistic church, or at least consorting with the deniers of Christ. But we have seen also many of these, like Peter, “**weep bitterly**” not for just a night, but for months and even years.

God has recorded these sad experiences of His saints that other saints may work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Whatsoe'er things aforetime written
These were, for our learning, meant;
Foolish then to heed not the warnings
Which to us, from God, are sent.

Saints of old, by God were chastened
How shall we not share like fate?
Seek His will and court His favor
For His leading—Watch and wait.

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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