

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

THE GREAT PERIL OF SUCCESS

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR APRIL 23

(II Chron. 26:3-5, 15-21)

Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem.

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did.

And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.

And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.

But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense.

And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men.

And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast transgressed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God.

Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censor in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar.

And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him.

And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord; and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

"Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem."

Uzziah is one of the most interesting of the many kings mentioned in the Old Testament. With one exception, he sat longer on the throne of David than any of Judah's rulers, and—a thing quite unusual—he was made king by decision of the people themselves.

He was a man who seized upon and used new ideas. "And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal." He became a great ruler. Under him the power of Judah was mightily increased. His name spread far abroad. And then, at the very apogee of his prosperity and fame, he gave to the world for all time a lesson in wilful conduct that none interested in Christian living can afford to ignore.

At first, the king, as our text tells us, "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did." He imitated the good in his father's life, ignoring the bad, conduct worthy of sons today. Uzziah "sought God," but it was evidently due in large measure to the influence of the priest Zechariah, "who had understanding in the visions of God." In his desire to do that which Jehovah required of him, the king, as many a man has since, found how helpful it is to turn at times to one who has close communion with the living God.

PROSPERITY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

And so we come to the first great lesson in Uzziah's long and eventful career: "And as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper."

It is no reflection on any man that his determination to do right is strengthened by a knowledge of the fact that God makes the righteous to prosper. The Bible abounds in declarations of the fact that the Heavenly Father has linked man's good with goodness.

The Psalmist announces, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." And again, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Solomon repeatedly points out the advantage of right doing. "For the upright

shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it," and "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

Even people collectively prosper by doing right: "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." Paul assures Timothy that "Godliness is profitable unto all things." In Job we find that even Satan knew that there was a relation between prosperity and righteousness, although he regarded prosperity as an inducement to righteousness when it was a reward for righteousness. Christ gives us the beatitudes, each one of which crowns virtue with reward.

REWARDS GREATER THAN WEALTH

It must not be understood, however, that reward promised is necessarily measured by dollars and cents. There are rewards immeasurably greater than money can buy; in fact, money itself is not always a blessing. A big fortune in anticipation has ruined more young men than it has ever blessed. An estate has often separated families after its enervating influence has sapped the strength of the children and made them a prey to luxury.

Other things being equal, righteousness brings a net result of good in any business or occupation.

A merchant may profit temporarily by dishonesty, but if he expects a prolonged success he must build upon a basis of fair dealing.

A lawyer may win a few cases by trickery, but in the long run character, probity and truthfulness win out. The lawyer who deliberately tries to obscure the line between right and wrong will finally find himself unable to discern the line when he looks for it, while the lawyer who conscientiously observes the oath which he takes to aid in the administration of justice and who endeavors to aid the judge and the jury in finding and applying the truth will increase his power to discern the truth, and thus become more valuable to his clients.

THE ONLY ROAD TO REAL SUCCESS

Even in politics (the word "even" is merely a concession to popular prejudice) it pays to be upright. Character is the power of endurance in man, and nowhere more than in politics.

But suppose that one could, by short cuts in business, in the professions, or in politics win more than he could by righteousness. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Prosperity cannot be measured by the amount of food that one takes into his body, by the amount of clothing that one puts upon his back, or by the magnificence of the roof that shelters him. These things minister to the body. They are necessary, but the body is the least of man's possessions.

The possessions of the mind, though seemingly less necessary are more precious than the things that supply man's physical wants, and the satisfactions of the soul are still greater and more lasting than the things that give mental pleasure.

Prosperity is the securing of that which is best for us, and righteousness is the only road that leads to real success.

UZZIAH'S PRIDE AND PUNISHMENT

The king sought the Lord in the days of his growth. "But when Uzziah was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God." Or, as the Revised Version has it, "His heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly, and he transgressed against Jehovah his God."

His sin may seem trivial to those who put a light estimate upon the secret springs of action and the beginnings of evil. He "went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." This was the duty of the priest. The king had no more authority in such matters than the caretaker of the temple; he had no right to exercise priestly functions.

That he did not inadvertently sin is evident from the manner in which he resented the deserved rebuke. If the act had been due to ignorance, he would quickly have withdrawn in shame, but he would quickly have withdrawn in ignorance, he would quickly have withdrawn in shame. But when his attention was called to the law. But when his attention was called to the law. But when his attention was called to the law. But when his attention was called to the law. But when his attention was called to the law.

of Jehovah whom Azariah the chief priest called to his assistance. These defenders of the law withstood the king and said unto him, "It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense."

But Uzziah was wroth and while he attempted to usurp the place of the priests "the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests of the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar." He recognized his punishment and made no further defense when he was thrust out of the temple; "yea, himself hastened also to go out because the Lord had smitten him."

GOD'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE LAWS

Those who minimize the offense are apt to find fault with the punishment; because they think the sin relatively insignificant, they regard the punishment as relatively excessive. It is not necessary that man's finite mind shall comprehend God's laws in order to make them worthy of our respect and obedience.

Some who are prone to criticize the revealed will of God profess great reverence for God as He reveals himself in nature. They charge God with cruelty if He visits a severe punishment upon those who disobey His revealed commandments and, yet, they see about them in nature punishments more severe for acts which are due to ignorance or neglect. They see the careless paring of a toenail cause death from blood poisoning; or exposure to the weather cause cold, followed by a fatal attack of pneumonia. They profess great respect for the lower forms of life and yet a few mosquitoes can depopulate a community by introducing yellow fever, and a few rats can spread a plague. Man is but a little lower than the angels and yet an invisible germ can usher him into eternity.

THE PENALTY OF PRIDE

The sin for which Uzziah was punished was one of the most common and, therefore, one that could not be overlooked—"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Pride suppresses sympathy by building artificial barriers between neighbors; pride has been the fruitful cause of war. In the case of Uzziah, it was a conspicuous sin in a conspicuous person. The evil example would have been greater than if the sin had been committed by one of the common people and the influence exerted by the punishment was likewise more salutary.

In Uzziah we see a very common type. He was virtuous until pride, inspired by success, brought his downfall. It requires more moral strength to withstand great success than to endure the ordinary failures.

"HERE AM I; SEND ME"

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR APRIL 30

(Isaiah vi, 1-8)

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar:

And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

Today we are introduced to one of the greatest of prophets, Isaiah.

Some of the critics have suggested the existence of two Isaiahs, or rather that two persons instead of one are responsible for that which is contained in the book which bears the prophet's name. They base their opinion upon a supposed difference in style, contending that the writing of the two parts is so different as to indicate a dual authorship.

Reference is made to this criticism merely to call attention to a common characteristic of the Bible critic. He does not look for things to approve or to enjoy, but for things with which to find fault. The critics of Isaiah illustrate this.

Here is a book that is in a class by itself; in