

## 1 CHRONICLES 22:1-16


### PLANTING TREES YOU WILL NEVER SIT UNDER

“David said, ‘Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.’

“David commanded to gather together the resident aliens who were in the land of Israel, and he set stonecutters to prepare dressed stones for building the house of God. David also provided great quantities of iron for nails for the doors of the gates and for clamps, as well as bronze in quantities beyond weighing, and cedar timbers without number, for the Sidonians and Tyrians brought great quantities of cedar to David. For David said, ‘Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands. I will therefore make preparation for it.’ So David provided materials in great quantity before his death.

“Then he called for Solomon his son and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon, ‘My son, I had it in my heart to build a house to the name of the LORD my God. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.”’

““Now, my son, the LORD be with you, so that you may succeed in building the house of the LORD your God, as he has spoken concerning you. Only, may the LORD grant you discretion and understanding, that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep the law of the LORD your God. Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the rules that the LORD commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Fear not; do not be dismayed. With great pains I have provided for the house of the LORD 100,000 talents of gold, a million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond weighing, for there is so much of it; timber and stone, too, I have provided. To these you must add. You have an abundance of workmen: stonecutters, masons, carpenters and all kinds of craftsmen without number, skilled in working gold, silver, bronze and iron. Arise and work! The LORD be with you!””<sup>1</sup>

urgeon is quoted as saying that he grazed in many pastures but churned his own butter. This is a folksy way of saying that he was indebted to others for the ideas and for the concepts that were presented through the messages he preached. Just so, any preacher must confess that he owes a great debt to other servants of God; no one is truly original. I am compelled to confess that I’ve never had an original thought in my ministry; I’ve stood on the shoulder of giants. Each of us learns from others, we gain insight from others and we obtain ideas from others. The preaching that is delivered from any pulpit is the sum of influences of those who preceded in the service to Christ the King. That is especially true in my own ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Those who know me will know that I read widely. I enjoy a variety of literature forms, but among my favourite literature are books of sermons. Reading great sermons has served to stimulate my mind, suggesting great themes that I would otherwise pass over. Great sermons have served not only to enrich me, but to bless the congregations I have served. Though my message is apostolic, my preaching—the sermons that are crafted and the style in which those sermons are presented—is the sum of those men whose works and whose ideas have shaped my life. In turn, the sermons of these men were shaped by the writings of the Apostles and those who have provided the New Testament books. Adherence to the apostolic message has made those sermons great.

Numbered among the preachers to whom I owe a great debt is Dr. H. Gordon Clinard, a scholar who held appointment to the positions of Professor of Bible at Hardin-Simmons University, Professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Seminary and as the Billy Graham Chair of Evangelism at Southern Seminary. Dr. Clinard preached a sermon with this exact title and from this precise text some years past.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Clinard's message stimulated me to review the text, updating the material for this day and for this congregation.

Though it does not specifically say so, the text is about greatness—about making an impact that will last and that will make a difference. The passage lifts our eyes from the moment to the future. If we will but look with the eyes of faith, we will see that God is instructing us to live for what can be rather than squandering what we have on this passing moment.

There are many ways to measure the greatness of a man. Men may be considered great because of their talent, because of their possessions, because of their buildings and assuredly because of their service to their fellow man. The Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead espoused a standard of greatness which will upon reflection be confirmed as being of exceptional worth; Whitehead said, "*Great people plant shade trees they'll never sit under.*"<sup>3</sup>

Immediately you know what is meant; such an individual is unselfish, visionary, dedicated. His grasp of what shall follow is greater than the pressing demand of the moment. The philosophy may be summarised by noting that what we do today affects those who walk after us. Those who follow will inherit both our folly and our wisdom. How tragic that not all our plantings are good. It is inescapable that our sins and our negligence do afflict those who follow. Indifference and selfish lives that smack of careless existentialism find no greater challenge than in the poet's simple lines:

The builder lifted his old gray head,  
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,  
"There followeth after me today  
A youth whose feet must pass this way;  
This chasm that has been naught to me,  
To that fair haired youth may a pitfall be.  
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim,  
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> H. Gordon Clinard, "Planting Trees You Will Never Sit Under," in R. Earl Allen and Joel Gregory (eds.), **Southern Baptist Preaching Yesterday**, (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1991) 107-112

<sup>3</sup> [http://tentmaker.org/Quotes/wisdom\\_quotes3.html](http://tentmaker.org/Quotes/wisdom_quotes3.html), accessed 17 October 2014; see also, Jim Denison, "Honoring the Greatest Philosopher I Ever Knew," 03 June 2014, <http://www.denisonforum.org/etcetera/1059-honoring-the-greatest-philosopher-i-ever-knew>, accessed 17 October 2014

<sup>4</sup> Will Allen Dromgoole, "The Bridge Builder," <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/237102>, accessed 18 October 2014

Whitehead's philosophy would suggest that the work in which we engage must be recognised as having ramifications far beyond our immediate enjoyment. In an age which generally lives for the moment and which is enamoured with building its own monuments, greatness such as that described must be seen as a worthy goal. Today, we need a revival of men and women in the churches, in homes and in the nation who will plant shade trees for others. Nowhere does the thought of our need to see the big picture, the need to understand the broader implications of actions, become more apparent than in the work of a church. In order to understand the rationale behind this statement, review David's preparations for the Temple of God in light of these introductory remarks.

**TO PLANT TREES YOU WILL NEVER SIT UNDER REQUIRES A GREAT DREAM.** David had a dream of building a house to the glory of God. This was a dream he had long held. It will be helpful, to understand his dream, for us to review the national conditions and a specific event which preceded David's openly expressed desire. The nation had prospered under David's rule; the people lived in luxury and enjoyed an affluence they could not have imagined before his reign. Wealth and prosperity marked the people of God. National peace had been purchased through great sacrifice and through the removal of every threat to security that had previously been posed by surrounding nations—nations that were hostile to Israel. David was painfully aware of the marked dissimilarity between the national conditions and the situation for the Ark of God. God was blessing His people; and yet, there was no house built to honour Him as God.

His own palace completed, David's thoughts turned to the contrast between his own habitation and the House of God; accordingly, he mused to Nathan the prophet, "Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent" [**1 CHRONICLES 17:1**]. David could not imagine that God is pleased when His people lived in luxury while His house was neglected. David had in mind to build a Temple to the glory of God. Nor was this to be any temple; it was conceived as a Temple worthy of the Name of the Most High God. You will recall, however, that because of the manner in which David had secured the peace and prosperity enjoyed, he was prohibited by divine command from building a house to the LORD.

Following this divine proscription, David determined to build the Temple through the son whom God had promised. He began to accumulate materials for the building of the House of the LORD; and he began to dream, planning how the Temple would look. Although prohibited from actually building the Temple, he would dream and he would design a Temple for God though he himself would never see what was built, much less enter into that House of God. He would build a house worthy of the Name, and he saw that Temple with eyes of faith though he would not live to see it with human eyes. It is surely a mark of David's greatness that he planned for the future—he saw a future for the people of God and for the people he ruled.

The specific incident preceding the building of the Temple is recounted in the previous chapter of the Chronicles of Israel [**1 CHRONICLES 21:1-22:1**]. Recall how, in that account, we witness David numbering the fighting men. In a lapse of faith David began to trust more in the numbers under his command than in the LORD his God. There was more than a touch of pride in this action. David ordered a census of all the fighting men; and it led to disaster for his own people. As judgment fell on the people because of his sin, David built an altar and in repentance pleaded with God to cease His judgment. It was on that very spot where he had built the altar and humbled himself before the LORD that David determined to build the Temple to the LORD God. That spot was forever sanctified in David's mind; there, the Temple would sit.

The text itself immediately compels me to direct attention to two great truths. I note that to this day *it is the natural inclination of the human heart to exalt “self” above the LORD God.* This is true throughout history; and I note that it is still acceptable among the professed people of God to promote “self” above the Lord. Especially is this true among the people called by the Name of the Risen Christ in this day. We boast of the numbers we draw together in His Name. In our minds the great works are those which boast the greatest numbers in attendance or which have amassed the greatest wealth. We adulate the man who has notoriety, though often dismissing the man who walks humbly before God. The televangelist that has hundreds of thousand viewers must be great because he is well-known and idolised by multitudes.

We forget that it is by sovereign design that God blesses a work and that souls are added to the congregation by His grace and that the ability to advance a work is a mark of His mercy. The numbers game is pretty old, you see. I caution you that our sinful efforts to exalt a man are not pleasing to God, however acceptable the individual may be to others. Our sinful tendency of idolising mere mortals that must one day die, just as we must die, displeases the Master.

It is likewise a tragic truth that *many of us composing the churches of our Lord have ceased dreaming great dreams.* We are so cowed by the rush of daily life and the apparent frenzy of our lives that the capacity to dream has practically died. We are trapped by the possible, the feasible and the practical. You may laugh at Utopia if you wish, but I stand with the man who said, “It is our Utopias that make the world tolerable to us: the cities and mansions that people dream of are those in which they finally live.”<sup>5</sup> Few of us dream, and those who do expose themselves to unmerciful ridicule from others seized by the moment.

We desperately need to get off the treadmill of the present and dream about some tomorrows. What a shame that so many of us have lost the capacity for fantasy and dreaming, and can never escape the present. This condition limits human planning, being the ideology of an inert society. So, the work of God plods along at a tortoise pace, content to maintain the “status quo” instead of daring to dream of great advance. Because we are unconscious of the greatness of the work to which we are called and because we are insensible to the greater issues involved in life, we content ourselves to work for the moment instead of laying the foundation for the future.

Many of our big plans are like the city slicker lawyer in the hands of the wily old rancher. The lawyer wanted to buy a saddle horse. The rancher agreed to sell him one if he could catch it. The lawyer, together with his sons, chased the horse for three hours. Finally they caught him. Their sincerity and their sweat brought out a measure of honesty in the old rancher. He said, “I’ll still take your money for this horse, but before I do I want to tell you two things about him. First, he’s awful hard to ketch. The second thing is, he ain’t worth a durn when you ketch him.”

We are prone to design technical applications without a vision of what we are doing for the future. Content to focus on the moment we are unaware of the greater impact of our actions on those who will follow. When we do such, we are in effect investing all our energies in the moment without a thought to the future. Our dream ought to be a great thing. If we are content to dream of mere technology we should recall Henry Thoreau who watched men put up something they called telegraph wires. When he asked what they were for, he was told they would make it possible for people in Maine to talk with people in Texas. Thoreau's famous observation was: “But what if the people in Maine have nothing to say to the people in Texas, and the people in Texas have nothing to answer the people in Maine?” We are prone to have some tremendous means for dreadfully small ends.

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis Mumford, **The Story of Utopias** (Boni and Liveright, Inc., New York, NY 1922) 12

**TO PLANT TREES YOU WILL NEVER SIT UNDER REQUIRES SENSIBLE HUMILITY.** There are limits to what any one of us can do; consequently, God kept David from building the Temple. When David proposed building a Temple for the Lord, God sent Nathan to stop David from implementing his plans. God's word to David was, "You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest... He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever" [vv. 8b, 9a, 10a].

The work of God does not advance by division and strife. Some things disqualify us from building the House of God. But it is not always a matter of disqualification by our failure to have the character required to build; we are each limited in abilities and opportunity. The one attempting only what he is capable of doing is limited in the good he can ever hope to achieve. How much better to recognize limitations and to realize that we are dependent upon one another? If the Church is to advance, if the cause of Christ is to prosper, if any great work is to be established, we must do it together. There is no guarantee that our fellow man will recognize us for the work we do. We are in need of discovering that we are not indispensable and we need to learn to share. A man responded to his friend's question, "How are you?" with the answer, "I am fine; I have resigned as President of the Universe and the resignation has been accepted." He understood this great principle.

Not everyone can be a pastor of the congregation; a preacher requires listeners. Not everyone can direct the music; someone must sing and others must rejoice in the music produced. Not everyone can conduct the service; there must be a congregation to unite in worship. Not everyone can teach Sunday school; a teacher demands scholars. When we begin to compare ourselves to others feeling that we are perhaps slighted in recognition, it is a fair indication that we have ceased to work together united in a common vision of future benefits and that we have begun to live for the moment. Dear people, the work of the moment is destined for dust, just as are the deluded souls who live for the moment.

The Apostle Paul was never jealous of the works he established; he rejoiced in their victories and agonized over their failures. Looking back to the Church in Corinth he spoke of the workers God had raised up to bless those saints. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" [1 CORINTHIANS 3:6]. Notice the change of tense? Paul worked, though he didn't see his work come to fruition at that time. Apollos watered, not seeing the immediate blossoming of the work. Both did their work once and for all; but God continues giving the increase! God continually superintends the work, although the workers moved on.

In 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27 Paul instructed those same Corinthians: "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Ronald Reagan, while serving as President of the United States, was pictured working at his desk. On his desk a plaque could clearly be seen, upon which was written the following motto, “It is amazing what can be accomplished when it does not matter who receives the credit.” It is amazing indeed what one individual can do who no longer cares who gets the credit. When the motivating force for our labour becomes advance of the work to benefit future generations instead of personal aggrandisement, how powerful is the force unleashed! And how great is that work! We are all limited by talent, by circumstance, by opportunity. But if we are willing to do our part and humbly leave the rest for others—if we are willing to plant trees we will never sit under—there is no limit to what our life can mean to the cause of Christ.

When a people are united in a common dream they cease to compete and begin to complement. No longer does it seem important to do a task simply that you may be stroked or that your effort may be recognized; you then begin to labour because the task in which you are engaged is a great task and you share in the dream. The dream may not be realized in your day, but you live and labour in anticipation of benefit for your children and for those who follow. The secret to accomplishment is found in the final matter I wish to treat.

**TO PLANT TREES YOU WILL NEVER SIT UNDER REQUIRES A SENSE OF PRIORITY.** The cause is what is important. That cause must be big enough for me to want to go forward, far beyond my credit or my days. The House of God was to be where David had sought and found the ear of the Lord to turn aside the pestilence from the people of God.

David’s life would soon end; in submission to the will of God he surrendered prerogatives to build the Temple and set himself to preparation for a task that another would perform. This was the mark of David’s greatness. He set himself to superintend the accumulation of materials that the building would require. The materials collected were fabulous both in quantity and value—gold and silver in amounts never before seen, other metals in amounts which defied accounting and cedar trees in abundance. He prepared plans and appointed workmen for the task. All this and so much more David did for the cause of God.

Soon after this the aged king passed from the scene, and his body was long cold before the cause came to fruition. But Solomon fulfilled David’s dream. The Temple rose to the glory of God; the likes of which has not yet been surpassed in its magnificence. Constructed of stones brought from distant lands, of trees of greatest worth, of precious metals, the Temple was built in awesome silence, stone upon stone, timber upon timber, all adorned with precious metals and careful craftsmanship.

No hammers fell, no ponderous axes rung;  
Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.

**1 CHRONICLES 22:1-16**  
**PLANTING TREES YOU WILL NEVER SIT UNDER**

The cedars of Lebanon were mixed with vast quantities of gold and silver. The tapestries which were hung in the Temple were unbelievably beautiful. The building was magnificent indeed. Then Solomon dedicated it with the commitment: "I have indeed built You an exalted house, a place for You to dwell in forever" [**1 KINGS 8:13**].

David had built a house he never entered, but he entered a better one, one not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. David planted a tree he never sat under, but he found the shade of a better one, the tree of God's good pleasure. The cause was first; and the aged king performed an incomparable work for God.

The application of the message is by now apparent. Though we might make an application of the need for a new vision of our homes or for our nation, we would surrender the greater for the lesser. Although I would not disparage the work of building the nation as a great work, building the nation is not the greater work. Although I would not for a moment depreciate the work of building strong families, I would remind you that building the family is not the greatest work in which we may occupy ourselves. I am rather convinced that the greatest work in which any of us may ever engage our energies is that of building the House of God.

It is the unseen Temple, what the Bible calls the better Temple, of which I speak; and it is in this labour that we need to clarify our vision. It is the building up of one another in the church which ought to be the greater work to which we aspire. It is the advance of the kingdom of God which ought to be the greater work to which we aspire. It is the winning of the lost, the honouring of the Risen Saviour through living righteous lives which ought to be the greater work to which we aspire.

What is your vision for this church? What is your vision for the work of God in your community? What is your vision for the advance of the kingdom of God in your nation? We serve a great God; such service demands a great vision. The churches in this day have contented themselves with a vision of mini-kingdoms, protection of feeble fiefdoms, exaltation of puny people, when the challenge of the day demands a great vision. We have contented ourselves with playing with trinkets instead of building with the precious stones of the eternal Kingdom. It is time to purify and clarify our vision.

If Christ tarries, our city will be vastly different in coming days. Whether the difference will be for better or for worse will depend in no small measure upon our own congregation today. The churches that minister in that city will not be the same churches, though they must have the same message. What this church will be depends upon the response of the congregation to the challenges of the day. Whether the church will honour God or stand as a monument of past failure is determined by our present response to the changes occurring in our world.

I recommend we who share life in this congregation determine that we will build a great Temple to the glory of God. May I recommend that as a congregation we determine that we will provide materials worthy of His Name and that we will provide a vision which excites the imagination of those who shall follow. I encourage believers to determine that refined gold—that which glorifies the Lord God, that finest silver—the preaching of redemption in Christ, that costly jewels—those won to faith, be provided in abundance for this place. May God bless that vision. Amen.