

## “Extending the List”

### Hebrews 11:32-38

When we read about the great men and women of the Bible it's easy to put them “on a pedestal,” in other words, to reclassify them as something more than a normal human being. Instead of serving as an example for us to imitate they become superhuman action heroes who lived at a level no one today could ever hope to repeat. We admire them from afar and say all sorts of positive things about them, but never for a moment consider ourselves capable of doing anything like what they did. For us, great saints tend to make great statues but not great mentors. But in today's lesson we're going to stop thinking that way and start looking at the faith of others and ourselves with different eyes.

We need to realize that God has a different assignment for each person. One might be called to lead a nation and another their own family, and thankfully the Bible tells us God doesn't compare people to one another. He evaluates each of us by our faithfulness to do what He's asked us to do. This means Moses will be evaluated by what Moses was asked to do, and I will be evaluated by what I was asked to do, and so will you. Greatness in God's Kingdom then isn't determined by numbers or whether or not an event is recorded in history. He decides greatness by the depth of selfless love we invest in obeying what He's asked us to do.

Being Moses was a challenging assignment, and frankly, so is being a single mom or a hard-working dad. You see, God doesn't judge us based on outward circumstances, He looks at the heart, so some of the greatest acts of faith in human history will never be known until we hear about them in heaven.

#### A. How does God evaluate?

1) God looks at the heart

- (1Sa 16:7) “...for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”
- It's not what you do, it's why you do it
- Do even we really know our own heart?

2) The greatest among you shall be your servant (Mt 23:11)

- Also: Mt 20:25-28; Lk 22:24-27
- He looks for humility, love and continuing in these over time.

3) The last shall be first

- Mt 19:30-20:16
- The same reward is given to each one who was faithful to the opportunity they were given.
- (Jn 17:4) “I have glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work You have given Me to do.”

#### B. Extending the List

Real faith empowers people to make hard choices and to endure in their commitment even though they are strongly tempted to quit. The Bible supplies us with glorious examples of such faith, but the list of faithful men and women doesn't end at the last page of the Bible. It continues on through church history, sometimes recorded, but largely going unnoticed and forgotten except by God. The fact is we continue to be surrounded by people whose faith has led them to profound acts of selfless service. In some cases their faith is exposed by a crisis, in others it is so part of the way they live that unless you knew their heart, you'd never recognize the faith that drives what they do.

By faith:

- Left a promising job in the tech industry to pastor
- Called his father who he'd not seen in 45 years so that he might honor him as the Lord commanded
- Went to work at 4:00am for 20 years to provide for the family the Lord had given him
- Lived a celibate life, refusing the sexual temptations which harassed him so that he would not be enslaved to a passion the Lord condemned
- Refused advances by many men choosing instead to remain loyal to the vows she made at her marriage
- Clung to Christ through worship and the Word rather than yield to despair after her husband abandoned her
- Refused to steal even a penny from the business where she worked, preferring instead the treasure which awaited her in heaven
- Prayed for her wayward son for 30 years imploring God to rescue him from eternal destruction
- Taught generations of children in a Sunday School class, seeking to sow God's seed into the soft soil of their hearts, confident she would welcome many into heaven after she died



# LIFE LESSONS

## WITH DR. STEVE SCHELL

Teaching the Bible  
practically & understandably  
and seeing lives changed by  
the truth of the Gospel

- Left a good job and family to serve as a missionary in a nation that had little money but many hungry souls
  - Endured decades of disapproval and ridicule by parents and siblings in order to obtain a gospel that would save her and enable her to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit
  - Overcame the fear of rejection to proclaim Christ to his father on his deathbed so that he might never be separated from him again
  - Patiently remained in a difficult marriage so that he might fulfill the vows he made as a young man
  - Lived a simple life in rented homes rather than pursuing a career so that she might disciple her children unto the Lord, believing the promises God had spoken over each child
  - Wrote hundreds of letters to people in prison believing that as she was extending her love in this way God was extending His
  - Filled her small home with materials used to make Christmas gifts which she sold each year to raise money for missions
- And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of those who: tithed; adopted; served as foster parents; refused to abort; became nurses, EMTs, doctors to ease the suffering of others; worked for years in RFKC, Kids' Club, Food Pantry, as a greeter, on summer missions...

### C. Application

1) Evaluating others

- a) We don't know God's plan
- b) We don't know their heart
- c) We don't know their inner struggles (C.S. Lewis)

2) Evaluating myself

- a) Stop comparing yourself with others (favorably and unfavorably)
- Stop counting numbers; stop being hyper-critical of yourself; none of us can know the effect one changed life has over future generations.
  - What has He asked you to do?
  - What does obedience to the Bible require you to do?

When all is said and done, can we say with Jesus, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given me to do" (Jn 17:4).

### D. Questions:

- 1) Without necessarily using the person's name, mention someone you know who has "extended the list" by a great act of obedience or years of loving service.
- 2) Have you ever misjudged someone's actions, finding out later what their true motive was? Is it an example you could share with us?