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March 2023 “The Checkered Lives of Heroes”

Dear Friends,

One morning many years ago after I had started preaching, but before I was in full-time ministry, I was walking to the bus stop to go to my job and talking to God about His calling on my life. I told Him, “I just don’t think I can measure up,” and in my mind I was comparing myself to certain ministers who had very large churches or worldwide ministries. He replied and asked, “Whose standard are you trying to measure up to, yours or Mine?” He paused for a moment to let that sink in, then He continued, “I will never call you to measure up to a standard you cannot meet.” In other words, whatever He calls me to do, I can do it. I had allowed what other ministers had accomplished to impact my thinking to the point that I wanted to be – and thought I needed to be – like them.

This is a major problem with a lot of Christians. They measure themselves by others and conclude that in their lives they will never be much, never accomplish much and be relegated to a lower level of usefulness unto God. What they don’t consider is that they are looking at the positive accomplishments made public but have no idea what it took for these ministers to become well-known. Along with that, Christians often exalt famous characters in the Bible and wish they could be like them. While that would seem to be a very noble desire, very often these biblical champions have an unflattering past. Though we rarely know about the “behind-the-scenes” lives of successful ministers today, God not only reveals the victories but also the poor choices of those in the Bible we tend to admire.

Hebrews chapter eleven is often referred to as the Faith Hall of Fame. In that chapter, numerous individuals are identified as having accomplished great feats for God because of their faith. Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samson and David are among those named as heroes of faith, and there are others who also achieved notable success because they trusted God. Let’s take a close look at some of these champions.

NOAH – We are introduced to Noah in Genesis 5:28-29. In Genesis 6:9, God stated that Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations (meaning that he was notably committed unto God compared to others living during his lifetime), and that he walked with God (sought fellowship and communion with God). He is also called a preacher of righteousness in 2 Peter 2:5. Then, from Genesis chapter six through chapter nine, we read the story of how God spoke to Noah about the coming destruction of the world through a global flood and instructed him to build an ark for his family and animals. Noah built the ark and the human race essentially started over after the flood. However, in Genesis 9:18-29 we read that after the flood, Noah drank wine and got so drunk he passed out naked in his open tent. Is that immeasurably embarrassing event the kind of legacy you would want the world to read about your life?

ABRAHAM AND SARAH – Their story is recorded in Genesis chapters 12-20. God made them a promise that they would have a miracle baby. He repeated this more than once to them. He even changed their names in order to reflect that promise. In fact, in Genesis, Romans, Galatians and James, the Bible states that Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him as righteousness. Even so, in their desperation to have a child, Abraham and Sarah agreed that he would have intimate relations with Hagar, Sarah's maid, so that they could have a child. The result turned out to be disastrous as Ishmael was born of that illicit act, and his descendants cause problems unto this day.

LOT – Lot was Abraham's nephew who traveled with Abraham as God was leading him to the land of promise. In 2 Peter 2:7-8, the Bible declares that Lot was just, righteous and had a righteous soul. But after Lot and his two daughters were delivered from God's judgment and destruction of Sodom, each daughter got him drunk on consecutive nights, had sex with him, and gave birth to sons, Moab and Ben-Ammi (Genesis 19:1-38). The Moabites and Ammonites were militaristic threats to Israel for centuries.

JACOB – Jacob was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. God changed Jacob's name to Israel, the namesake of an entire nation. Jacob was the father of 12 sons who became the 12 Jewish tribes mentioned throughout the Bible. Yet Jacob was the kind of person who wasn't the most honest as he tended to do whatever it took to get what he wanted. In Genesis 25:20-34, Jacob took advantage of his brother Esau's hunger and manipulated him into signing over his birthright. Then, in Genesis 27:1-40, we read how Jacob disguised himself as Esau to deceive his father Jacob – now blind – into giving him Esau's blessing.

MOSES – Moses is, without question, one of the greatest heroes of the Bible. He was used of God to bring about the plagues that devastated Egypt until Pharaoh agreed to let the Jews go free. He had a personal audience with God to receive both the Ten Commandments and the ordinances by which the Jews were to live. God used him to part the Red Sea. God used him to get water from a rock. But in spite of his incredible legacy, Moses had some rather infamous moments in his life. He murdered a man in Exodus 2:11-12, and in Numbers 20:1-13, his demonstration of tempestuous fury resulted in God not allowing him to enter the Promised Land.

SAMSON – Samson's story is recorded in Judges chapters 13-16. God used him to perform superhuman feats of strength to repeatedly defeat the Philistines. However, Samson had a weak spot for the ladies which ultimately cost him his eyes and his life.

ELIJAH – Elijah's story begins in 1 Kings chapter 17. He prophesied a drought, God had ravens feed him, he raised a widow's son from the dead, parted the Jordan River, outran King Ahab and his chariot, and was used of God in an incredible, miraculous fashion during a confrontation with 450 prophets of Baal, resulting in their deaths. He *knew* how God had moved and used him. But the moment evil Jezebel threatened to have him killed, he ran a day's journey into the wilderness, flopped down under a juniper tree and asked God to kill him. Where was his faith then?

DAVID – The greatest king in Israel’s history, David’s legacy is unparalleled. Under David’s leadership, Israel became the major power in the entire Middle East. He created instruments of worship and gave us tremendous revelation and insight about worship and how much it means to God. He wrote numerous, vivid Messianic prophecies; in fact, it was prophesied that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. He was also instrumental in returning the Ark of the Covenant to Israel. But in 2 Samuel chapter eleven, we learn that David was guilty of committing adultery with Bathsheba, getting her pregnant, then conspiring to have her husband killed in battle.

SIMON PETER – Peter was one of the first men Jesus called to be an Apostle (Matthew 4:18-22). He, along with James and John, composed what we might call Jesus’ “inner circle” of disciples. Peter was among the group Jesus sent out two-by-two to preach the Kingdom of God, heal the sick, cast out devils, cure diseases and raise the dead (Matthew 10:1-8, Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6). He walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33). He preached on the Day of Pentecost and around 3,000 people accepted Jesus as Savior. But on the day Jesus was arrested, Peter cursed and denied he ever knew Him (Matthew 26:69-75).

PAUL – The Apostle Paul was used of God to establish numerous churches. He trained many for ministry. An untold number of people were born again, filled with the Holy Spirit, delivered, healed, raised from the dead and received miracles. God used him to write almost half of the New Testament. Yet, Paul had persecuted Christians, having them arrested, imprisoned, tortured and even executed (Acts 7:58-8:3, 9:1-2, 22:4-5, 22:19-20, Galatians 1:13).

No matter how much good each of these individuals accomplished for God, they all had legacies of rebellion, sin and failure that go beyond what most of us have ever done in our own lives. But when God identifies the accomplishments of the Hebrews chapter 11 faith heroes, *not one time does He mention their blunders and shortcomings!* If all we knew about these people were the mistakes – and even criminal behavior – they had committed, and were then asked if we thought God would use such people, many of us might reply, “No way!” But therein lies both the mystery and the glory of God’s grace.

Not once did God approve of or ignore the transgressions of those people. They were all held accountable and, in some cases, paid dearly for what they had done. But God knew that in spite of their wrongdoings, they would still seek to serve Him.

I am guessing that every person reading this letter has at least one dark event from their past they want to keep secret from others. It could also be that what was done is no longer a secret but is known to many. The key in this is not what you’ve done, but whether or not you are trusting God at this point in your life. If God was willing to use all the people I’ve mentioned in spite of what they did, why wouldn’t He want to use you? You may claim to have a long list of sins that you believe keep you from being used by God, but have you forgotten what God promised?

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. (Hebrews 10:17)

God knew you before you were born, and He has a very specific plan for your life.

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:16)

Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. (Isaiah 49:1)

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)

Since God knew you before you were born He also knew every decision you would make, including every act of sin, rebellion, and unrighteousness. Thus, He was also ready to completely forgive you the moment you genuinely repented from your heart. Then, He had a plan to develop and lead you into the fulness of His will for your life.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6)

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

If you make any mistakes along the way, He will be there to help.

For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. (Isaiah 50:7)

Even though all of this is true, some Christians still seem stuck on, “Yeah, but...” They keep bringing up excuses for why God can’t use them. I would challenge you to read again all the acts of indiscretion committed by the people I’ve identified in this letter. Every single one of them could have claimed, “Yeah, but...” when God wanted to use them, but they allowed God’s grace and mercy to touch their hearts and minds and continued on to accomplish what He desired. Even if you are guilty of all the sins each of them committed, the same grace and mercy are extended to you. Some may wonder, “Why? Why would God do this?” I’ll let Him explain from His Word:

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16)

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.
(Matthew 5:14)

God is love and He wants us to know how deeply He loves us. He never overlooks our sin, but He is always ready to forgive and cleanse in response to a repentant heart. Furthermore, we are all He has in the Earth. He wants the lost to know the salvation He offers through Jesus. He needs us to be His vessels of honor who will lead people to know Him as Father. He does not hold grudges and does everything we let Him do to fully restore us no matter what we've done.

You are not a second-class citizen in God's Kingdom! Yes, you may have done some terrible things in life, but none of them are beyond the cleansing power of Jesus' blood and none of them have disqualified you from being used by God. God will restore you, He will use you, and He will equip you for everything He's called you to be and do. To borrow from a popular worship song, He is a good, good Father!

In His Grace,

Jim

PS – I'd like to share more with you about God's love and how He restores us when we sin. Use the form below to order a CD of my sermon, *A Revelation of God's Love*. I know it will be a blessing to you.

2023 REVIVAL NOW! CONFERENCE

The conference will be held Sunday, April 23 – Friday, April 28. These conferences are filled with in-depth teaching that will help you grow spiritually and develop your ministry calling. There will be a morning and an evening service each day except Friday when there will only be a morning service. There is no charge to attend and I greatly encourage you to do your best to be a part of what will be an outstanding week of services in God's presence. If you have any questions, please send me an email (PastorJimGCC@gmail.com).

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