

DEUTERONOMY 34:1-12 & 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8

PEOPLE ARE OFTEN DRAWN TO FAME, WHETHER IT IS TO OBTAIN SOME FOR THEMSELVES, OR TO INTERACT, IF ONLY FOR A FEW MOMENTS, WITH SOME FAMOUS PERSON.

SOMETIMES, HOWEVER BEING IN THE PRESENCE OF THOSE WE PERCEIVE ARE IMPORTANT OR POPULAR OR GREAT CAN BE INTIMIDATING. LAST SUNDAY I LISTENED TO A LIVESTREAM ON MY COMPUTER FROM TWO FOLK MUSIC ARTISTS.

ONE OF THEM SHARED A STORY THAT HAPPENED YEARS EARLIER, ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE SHE HAD THAT WAS THE FAULT OF THE OTHER ARTIST.

HE CALLED HER AND EXPLAINED HIS NEIGHBOR, PAUL, WAS PRODUCING A ONE NIGHT PLAY FOR CHARITY AT A LOCAL THEATER, NEAR WHERE HIS LIVED.

HE SHARED THAT ONE OF THE ACTRESSES BECAME ILL AND COULD NOT DO THE PERFORMANCE. SHE WAS THEN ASKED IF SHE COULD COME TO DO IT SINCE THEY NEEDED SOMEONE WHO COULD SING.

HE ADDED THAT HE KNEW SHE WOULD ALREADY BE PASSING THROUGH THAT AREA ON HER WAY TO HER OWN SHOW.

SHE AGREED, BUT IT WAS NOT UNTIL SHE ARRIVED AT THE THEATER THE NIGHT OF THE ONE REHEARSAL, SHE FOUND OUT THE NEIGHBOR, WAS PAUL NEWMAN.

HIS WIFE, JOANNE WAS THE NARRATOR, JULIA ROBERTS THE FEMALE LEAD, CAROL KING WAS ALSO IN THE PLAY, ALONG WITH A FEW OTHER CELEBRITIES.

THE FOLK ARTIST, WHO HAD NEVER BEEN IN A PLAY BEFORE HAD TO CALM HERSELF BY REMEMBERING IT WAS ONLY ONE PERFORMANCE.

ALL WENT PRETTY WELL UNTIL DURING THE SHOW THE ACTOR WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO LEAD HER OFF STAGE IN A SCENE NEAR THE END- MISSED HIS CUE.

SHE DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO, SO AFTER A COUPLE OF MINUTES SHE AD-LIBBED AN EXIT WHERE SHE ENDED UP CRASHING INTO SOMETHING OFF STAGE.

AFTER BEING QUIETLY SCOLDED BY PAUL NEWMAN, HER WISH WAS FOR THE NIGHT TO BE OVER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

SHE REALIZED ACTING WAS NOT HER GIFT AND SHE LONGED TO RETURN TO WHAT SHE WAS GOOD AT, WHICH IS BEING A FOLK SINGER.

YES, SOMETIMES BEING AROUND FAMOUS PEOPLE CAN BE DIFFICULT OR INTIMIDATING.

AND YET MANY PEOPLE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE BEEN IN THAT FOLK ARTIST'S PLACE, SO NEAR TO THOSE LEGENDS OF SONG AND MOVIE SCREEN.

THE PURSUIT OF WORLDLY FAME, OUR OWN OR ANOTHER'S, IS ESSENTIALLY THE DESIRE FOR PUBLIC ACCLAIM.

IT CAN ALSO BE THE WISH TO GO DOWN IN HISTORY FOR SOME GREAT DEED.

EVEN WHEN OUR MINDS TELL US THAT FAME WILL NOT TRULY FULFILL OUR HEART'S DESIRE OR DREAMS, THERE IS STILL AN ATTRACTION TO FAME FOR MANY PEOPLE.

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE, HOWEVER, BETWEEN BECOMING A LIVING LEGEND IN THE WORLDLY SENSE, AND BEING KNOWN AS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS OF LIVING OUT OUR FAITH IN GOD.

WHEN IT COMES TO EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE WE ARE MOST LIKELY TO COMPARE OURSELVES WITH THEM- AND JUDGE THAT WE COME UP FAR SHORT OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

BUT REMEMBER, NEITHER MOSES, NOR PAUL WAS INCLINED TO PURSUE FAME OR FORTUNE.

THEY DID NOT SET OUT TO BE PILLARS OF FAITH OR LEGENDARY FIGURES IN SCRIPTURE, AND YET THEY ARE.

MOSES DEDICATED OVER 40 YEARS OF HIS LIFE IN TOTAL SERVICE TO THE LORD.

ALMOST AGAINST HIS WILL HE OBEYED GOD, AND LEAD ISRAEL OUT OF SLAVERY IN EGYPT.

HE RISKED HIS OWN LIFE TO STAND UP TO PHARAOH AND ISSUE GOD'S COMMAND: "LET MY PEOPLE GO".

AND WHEN THINGS AT FIRST WENT AGAINST HIM HE PERSEVERED IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD.

HE LED THE PEOPLE THROUGH 40 YEARS OF WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS.

ALONG THE WAY HE FOUGHT AGAINST GOD'S ENEMIES FROM WITHOUT, AND ENDURED CRITICISM AND HARASSMENT BY THE VERY PEOPLE OF GOD HE HAD BEEN SENT TO SHEPHERD.

THROUGH IT ALL MOSES WAS FAITHFUL, GIVING HIS VERY LIFE OVER TO THE LORD'S WILL, SO THAT HIS GREATNESS IS PRAISED IN SCRIPTURE.

"NEVER SINCE HAS THERE ARISEN A PROPHET IN ISRAEL, WHOM THE LORD KNEW FACE TO FACE.

HE WAS UNEQUALED FOR ALL THE SIGNS AND WONDERS THAT THE LORD HAD SENT HIM TO PERFORM IN EGYPT, AGAINST PHARAOH AND ALL HIS SERVANTS...

AND FOR ALL THE MIGHTY DEEDS AND ALL THE TERRIFYING DISPLAYS OF POWER THAT MOSES PERFORMED IN THE SIGHT OF ISRAEL."

MOSES WAS GIVEN MANY DIFFERENT TITLES, DURING HIS LIFE, AND AFTER HIS DEATH, INCLUDING: PRINCE OF EGYPT, SHEPHERD, HUSBAND, FATHER, PROPHET, AND SERVANT OF THE LORD.

THIS LATTER TITLE WAS USED TO DESCRIBE HIM AFTER HIS DEATH, AND IS USED A TOTAL OF SEVENTEEN TIMES IN THE BIBLE TO SPEAK ABOUT MOSES.

HE CERTAINLY BECAME A LEGEND, NOT ONLY FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, BUT FOR CHRISTIANS AS WELL.

HOWEVER, HIS SIGNIFICANCE IS NOT FOUND IN HIS TITLES OR EVEN HIS DEEDS, AS IMPORTANT AS THEY WERE.

INSTEAD THE IMPORTANCE OF MOSES IS IN HOW AND WHY HE OFFERS TO US TODAY AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW.

SO WHAT IS IT HE CAN TEACH US, THAT MAY BE USEFUL IN OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS?

FIRST, WE HEARD IN LAST WEEK'S SCRIPTURE HOW MOSES NOT ONLY STROVE TO OBEY GOD, BUT HE SOUGHT GREATER KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD.

SECONDLY, HE SERVED GOD IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, INCLUDING THE OPPOSITION OF PHARAOH OF THE MIGHT OF HIS ARMY.

MOSES ALSO SERVED IN THE MIDST OF PEOPLE WHO WERE QUICK TO TURN AGAINST HIM, AND GOD, WHEN THINGS WENT POORLY FOR THEM.

THIRDLY, HE SOUGHT TO BE A BEACON OF FAITH TO THOSE WHO KEPT TURNING TOWARDS THE DARKNESS.

IN THIS SENSE MOSES AND THE APOSTLE PAUL HAD A LOT IN COMMON.

THE APOSTLE PAUL SUFFERED NOT ONLY FROM VERBAL OPPOSITION, BUT ALSO PHYSICAL PERSECUTION.

HE SOUGHT TO BRING THE GOSPEL TO, AND BOOST OF FAITH OF, THOSE WHO WERE EASILY PULLED AWAY FROM CHRIST.

PAUL EVEN HAD TO GO UP AGAINST SOME OF THE OTHER APOSTLES A FEW TIMES.

THIS HAPPENED, BECAUSE JESUS LED HIM TO ACCEPT THE GENTILES INTO THE CHURCH ON AN EQUAL BASIS AS JEWS, AND SOME IN THE CHURCH DID NOT THINK IT WAS RIGHT.

THUS, PAUL, LIKE MOSES, OFFERS US A GOOD EXAMPLE OF PERSEVERANCE AND FAITHFULNESS.

IN HIS LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS HE BRIEFLY MENTIONS SOME OF THESE STRUGGLES.

AND THEN HE OFFERS INSIGHT INTO WHAT THE MANNER OF MINISTRY ALL APOSTLES OF CHRIST ARE CALLED TO EXHIBIT. HIS WORDS ARE USEFUL FOR ALL CHRISTIANS TODAY.

FIRST, PAUL REMINDS US TO HAVE COURAGE TO SHARE WITH OTHERS THE LOVE OF GOD SHOWN THROUGH OUR SAVIOR.

SECONDLY WE ARE NOT TO SEEK TO DRAW PEOPLE TO CHRIST OR THE CHURCH, USING DECEPTION OR GIMMICKS.

INSTEAD CHRIST'S OWN COMMANDS ARE TO BE OUR GUIDE, AS MATTHEW 22:37-39 PROCLAIMS:

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND ALL YOUR SOUL, AND ALL YOUR MIND.

THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT. AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

HERE WE ARE GIVEN GUIDANCE BY JESUS HIMSELF, WHO TEACHES THE ENDS DO NOT JUSTIFY THE MEANS IN HIS CHURCH.

HIS CHURCH IS NOT TO SEEK TO GROW, OR TO MAKE DISCIPLES, IN WAYS THAT DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THE LOVE TAUGHT IN THE COMMANDMENTS.

NOR IS LEADERSHIP TO BE AUTHORITARIAN, BUT RATHER TO DISPLAY THE KIND OF CARE, GUIDANCE, AND PROTECTION PARENTS SHOULD SHOW FOR CHILDREN.

IT WAS IN THIS WAY, PAUL AND HIS FELLOW APOSTLES STROVE TO INTERACT WITH OTHERS, THUS OFFERING US A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE.

AND SO WE CAN SEE THAT MOSES AND PAUL ARE JUST TWO EXAMPLES OF THE GREAT PEOPLE IN WHOSE FOOTSTEPS WE WALK AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST.

THIS CAN BE INTIMIDATING LIKE I SAID EARLIER, AND SOME OF US MAY WISH WE COULD BE JUST A LITTLE MORE LIKE THEM, EVEN THOUGH THEY SEEM SO FAR ABOVE US.

AND YET, THE BIBLE TEACHES WE ARE ALL GIVEN GIFTS AND FRUIT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, SO THAT ALL WHO ARE SAVED THROUGH CHRIST, CAN DO THE TASKS TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED.

HELEN KELLER WROTE ABOUT HER KNOWLEDGE OF THE GREAT DEEDS OTHER PEOPLE HAD DONE, SAYING:

“I LONG TO ACCOMPLISH A GREAT AND NOBLE TASK, BUT IT IS MY CHIEF DUTY TO ACCOMPLISH SMALL TASKS AS IF THEY WERE GREAT AND NOBLE.”

ACTUALLY, WHENEVER WE ACCOMPLISH THE TASK OF FAITHFULLY SERVING THE LORD, AND WITNESSING TO CHRIST- OUR ACTIONS OR WORDS ARE GREAT AND NOBLE IN THEIR OWN SMALL WAYS.

THERE IS ALSO SOMETHING ELSE WE SHOULD REMEMBER WHEN WE LOOK TO THE LEGENDS OF SCRIPTURE.

THEY ALL WERE REGULAR PEOPLE CALLED TO SPECIAL TASKS, THEY ALSO WERE AS HUMAN AND FALLIBLE AS WE ARE.

GOD DID NOT CHOOSE MOST THEM BECAUSE THEY HAD GREAT MORAL INTEGRITY OR WERE ALREADY GREAT ROLE MODELS.

WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT MOSES WAS A MURDERER. HE ALSO FAILED GOD A COUPLE OF TIMES SO SEVERELY- THAT GOD FORBADE HIM TO ENTER THE PROMISED LAND.

PAUL, BEFORE HE KNEW CHRIST PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS CAUSING THE ARREST OF MANY, AND POSSIBLY THE EXECUTION OF SOME.

BUT EVEN AFTER HE BECAME AN APOSTLE HE WAS FAR FROM PERFECT.

ONCE IN FACT, HE HAD SUCH A STRONG DISAGREEMENT WITH THE APOSTLE BARNABUS THAT THE TWO MEN PARTED WAYS FOR A LONG WHILE.

I BRING UP THESE THINGS ONLY TO REMIND US THAT GOD WORKS THROUGH SINNERS ALL THE TIME, SO GOD CAN AND WILL WORK THROUGH US.

THE SIZE OF THE TASK, OR THE PERCEIVED GREATNESS OR LACK OF IT, IN WORLDLY OR SOCIAL TERMS IS MEANINGLESS AND TRANSITORY.

WHAT MATTERS IS OUR FAITHFULNESS TO THE LORD, AND THAT CAN ONLY TRULY BE JUDGED BY GOD.

SOMEONE ELSE WROTE ABOUT A BARRIER TO SERVICE THAT CAN BE FOUND IN THE MINDS OF MANY CHRISTIANS:

“TOO MANY PEOPLE LIVE LIVES INTIMIDATED AND INSECURE. THEY LOOK OUTSIDE AND FEEL OTHERS ARE SMART, GREAT, MORE PRIVILEGED, AND FEEL LIFE HAS BEEN UNFAIR TO THEM.

THEY PUT OTHERS ON A PEDESTAL AND LOOK DOWN ON THEMSELVES.”

THIS IS THE WRONG WAY TO VIEW OUR LIVES. LET US NEVER FORGET THAT WHILE HUMILITY IS A WORTHY TRAIT TO HAVE, NOT RECOGNIZING THE TALENTS, GIFTS, AND BLESSINGS GOD HAS GIVEN TO US IS A MISTAKE.

FURTHERMORE, WE SIN, WHEN WE FORGET, OR TO CHOOSE TO IGNORE, THE FACT GOD VALUES EACH PERSON, AND THAT INCLUDES EACH ONE OF US.

REMEMBER, ALL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST, HAVE AN UNIQUE ROLE TO PLAY IN GOD’S PLAN.

WE, WHO ARE BOUGHT BY THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF JESUS, ARE WORTHY AND IMPORTANT PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HIM.

NO, WE CANNOT BE MOSES, OR PAUL, OR ESTHER, OR MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS, BUT WE CAN BE OURSELVES, WHICH IS THE PERSON GOD HAS CREATED US TO BE.

FINALLY, WE WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT THE COMMAND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR INCLUDES TO LOVE OURSELVES.

INDEED, TO TELL THE STORY OF JESUS WITH INTEGRITY WE MUST FIRST EXPERIENCE IT AND STRIVE TO LIVE IT.

AND THIS MEANS LIVING OUT TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY THE TRINITY OF LOVE: GOD, OTHERS, AND OUR SELF.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS LORD, WE THANK YOU FOR TEACHING US THE POWER OF LOVE. WE PRAISE YOUR NAME FOR OUR SALVATION, FOR THE GIFT OF THE GOSPEL, AND FOR PRESERVING YOUR CHURCH THROUGHOUT THE AGES.

HELP US EACH DAY TO REMEMBER THE GIFT OF NEW LIFE WE HAVE, AND TO SEEK TO USE OUR LIVES IN SERVICE TO YOU. IN CHRIST’S NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: DEUT. 34:1-12 & 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8

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