

## The Substance of Things Not Seen

### 3. Called to Be Heroes

Hebrews 11:23-12:2

The Bible is full of the stories of men and women who did amazing and heroic things. Most of them were not great people, but they were heroes. Heroes are ordinary people who do the right thing at the right time. We saw a hero emerge from the bridge collapse in Minneapolis-St. Paul a few weeks ago. A young man was riding in the bus of school children. He was there because it was a part-time summer job. There was nothing outstanding about his young man. However, he had the presence of mind and the concern for the children to do what was needed to get them out of that bus to safety. Before that moment, if you had asked him if he was a heroic person, he would probably have laughed. But in that moment he became a hero.

Most of the heroes of the Bible were just like him. They didn't think they were extraordinary people. And most of them weren't. They just did what God called on them to do, in spite of their doubts and their fears, and they became heroes. Over and over again the people of the Bible felt they were too weak, too insignificant to do what God had called them to do.

Noah was nobody special, until he built that ark. Abraham was just an ordinary man. Yet, today Christians, Jews and Muslims call him their father. Why? Because he had enough faith to go where God sent him. Joseph was a slave and a convict. Yet he ruled over Egypt. Moses stuttered, but God used him to speak to Pharaoh. There was Gideon, who described himself as the least important man in the least important clan in the least important tribe of Israel. He was called by God to defeat a mighty army which was oppressing Israel. Gideon never felt worthy of his calling. But he was obedient to God's call. He didn't have great faith. He doubted himself and his call all the way. But he had enough faith to do what God told him to do. As a result he did win a great victory. Jephthah was the illegitimate son of a prostitute, but God raised him to be a leader in Israel. Deborah was a woman in a man's world, and God used her to lead the armies of Israel. Samson was an irresponsible party animal, but God used him to destroy the Philistines. Ruth was a widow and a Gentile, and she was the great-grandmother of David. David was a boy when he faced Goliath. Daniel was a slave living in exile when he chose to enter the lion's den rather than worship a false God. Jeremiah suffered from manic depression when he preached words of hope to a nation in exile. Hosea had an unfaithful wife while he was calling Israel to be faithful to God. Amos was a shepherd sent to preach to the leaders of Israel. Jesus was a carpenter and the Son of God. The disciples were fishermen and tax collectors, called to preach salvation to the world. Paul was a short, bald little man with bad eyesight and poor health and the greatest evangelist in the history of the church.

They all had their moments of doubt. They couldn't see any way they could do the impossible things God called them to do. Yet they did. They changed the course of history because they did what God called them to do. Were they great people? No. Were they heroes? Yes. They were heroes because of their faithfulness to a great God.

Hebrews calls us to follow their example. We have been called to do heroic things.

Last week I talked about great things. I talked about building the Kingdom of God on earth and preparing the way for the New Jerusalem. I'll tell you that I broke all the rules. The experts tell us that we should never preach sermons about the distant future. They tell us that this generation is only concerned about what is happening here and now. They want instant gratification. They tell us that if you want this generation to listen to you, don't talk about eternal life. We should talk about the abundant life Christ gives us in this lifetime. We should talk about what a pleasant, comfortable, happy life they can have if they will follow Jesus.

The only problem with that is it's not the gospel. It is true that there are many wonderful benefits to walking with Christ in faithfulness and obedience right here and right now. We can have an abundant life. However, this abundant life is seldom pleasant and comfortable.

If I am remembering rightly Jesus did not say, "Take up your picnic basket and follow me." He said, "Take up your cross and follow me." He tells us that in the Judgment Day, he will say to those who wanted and lived pleasant, comfortable lives, "You have already had your reward. I hope you enjoyed it." The greater reward is waiting for those who can endure by looking forward to completion of the work we have been given to do. God calls us to fulfill a great and wonderful purpose. When that mission is finally fulfilled, we will be there to enjoy the results. The greatest rewards are waiting for those who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the new world God is constructing through us.

Christ does not call people to have pleasant, happy lives. Christ calls people to live heroic lives.

Living an heroic life means simply to keep doing the work that God has given us to do in spite of our doubts.

Mother Teresa was a hero. This week her secret diary was published. It turns out that she was not a woman of great faith. She often found herself doubting the existence of God. Yet this woman spent her life giving the love of God to the sick and poor and hurting people of India. She didn't live a pleasant, happy life. She herself lived in poverty. She was tortured spiritually. Yet she remained faithful to her calling her entire life. Can anyone doubt that she has a great reward waiting for her? You can be certain that when she died and appeared before the throne of Judgment that she heard the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master." When the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth, she will be there, because she helped build a large portion of it.

The same is true of Aunt Josie. You don't know Aunt Josie. Mary Jo Flewellen was a very ordinary little woman who lived in Mineola, Texas. She was a member of a church on the first circuit I served. She died at the age of 86. The last several years of her life Aunt Josie walked to the nursing homes in Mineola every day, because the Lord had called her to take care of the old folks. She didn't stop until the day she went into the hospital. I went by to see her the day before she died. She said, "Preacher, I had a dream last night. I saw the chariots of fire coming to take me home." The next day they did come for her. Aunt Josie was not a great person. But she was a hero.

Each of us has been put here for a purpose. That purpose is to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. Each of us has been called to build it in different ways. Many people earn their living doing what God has called them to do to build the Kingdom of God. If your job is to care for people's needs and you do it lovingly, conscientious and honestly, you are building the Kingdom of God.

For some of us, fulfilling our calling has given us a pleasant, comfortable life. For others it is a difficult life. For most of us it has been somewhere in between: sometimes pleasant, sometimes difficult. That's not what matters. What matters is to continue to do what God has called us to do in the good times and in the bad times.

A few people become great doing what God has called them to do. Most do not. But all who are faithful to their calling become heroes.

The Bible is the story of ordinary people who became heroes because they answered God's call and, despite all their doubts and fear, they did what God called them to do, no matter how difficult and dangerous it was.

Hebrews tells us that these heroes of faith are our role-models. They have shown us how to live.