

Greatness

What Do You Hope to Achieve?

When I headed off to college, I knew I would not stop at gaining a bachelor's degree. It was always my plan to end with some sort of doctorate. As a freshman, it was going to be from a medical school but after the Lord very powerfully called me into Christian ministry, I realized it would come from a seminary. I thought I was really achieving something by earning a doctor's degree and I worked hard at it to be as qualified as possible to do my work. I thought I would be called Dr. Walkup by the people of the churches I served and in other professional settings. It turned out that the only person who has ever called me doctor other than the short time I was an adjunct professor at a small seminary was my wife. And she even stopped in time. You discover as you grow older that what you may think are your great achievements often go unnoticed or are criticized. One of my favorite movies is the trilogy set of the Lord of the Rings and in the last of them, The Return of the King, Aragorn, who was about to go into battle tried to reassure Eowyn that even if she did not go fight, what she did would be crucial to the war effort. He noted, "A time may come soon when none will return. Then there will be need of valour without renown, for none shall remember the deeds that are done in the last defense of your homes. Yet the deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised."

Most of the good done in this life goes unrecognized and unpraised. Greatness is not defined by the acknowledgement it receives but rather by the quality and character of it. One time, when I was little, about seven years old, I went riding around the block on my bike. An elderly man lived in the neighborhood and for some reason, I went over to his house and visited with him. I did not notice the passing of time, but my parents sure did. Frantic because I was missing, my dad who was a police officer and certainly knew the dangers facing missing kids, hunted for me to no avail. When I casually rode back home, I was greeted, not by affirmation because I had given a lonely, elderly man my friendship but with a spanking for disappearing. Good deeds do not always get recognized, and kindness is often ignored. One of the major complaints of kids is that their parents don't notice all the good they do but only focus on their mistakes. Have you ever felt that way?

The prophet Jeremiah, who some would argue was the most courageous and faithful of the Old Testament prophets was certainly not appreciated by most of his peers. Jeremiah discovered somehow that the very people he was faithfully sharing with the word of God secretly were planning to kill him for confronting their sin. **Because the Lord revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more."** (Jeremiah 11: 18-19 NIV) Jeremiah was not alone among the prophets. Few of them were actually respected and honored for their faithfulness. Jesus noted the long history of the people of Israel despising the very ones God sent to help them. **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.** (Matthew 23: 37 NIV) Of course, the best of us all, Jesus Christ our Savior was crucified for all the good He did.

There is a fascinating incident described in the Gospels that interestingly enough is shared with differing sets of details from one Gospel writer to the next. Let's start with how the Apostle John introduces the snapshot in time. At a dinner Jesus and his disciples attended, not long before Christ was arrested, something strange took place. **Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.** (John 12: 3 NIV) Notice the details. It was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus who did this. This specific person poured a large amount of expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. But not everyone thought this was a great thing to do. **But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray**

him, objected, **"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.** (John 12:4-5 NIV)

You may say. "Well, of course, Judas Iscariot would criticize Mary for that. Judas was a terrible person who betrayed Jesus." Mary could easily let his complaints go. But notice what Matthew reported. **While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."** (Matthew 26: 6-9 NIV) It was not just Judas who griped about it, all the disciples grumbled over Mary wasting the perfume on Jesus. That would be much tougher to ignore. Perhaps Jesus noticed her reaction. Maybe He wanted to nip in the bud the bad attitude of His disciples. **Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.** (Matthew 26: 10 NIV) If no one else at the party saw the beauty of Mary pouring the perfume on Jesus' feet, the Lord did.

Now, there is a strange detail you may not have caught. Both Matthew and Mark fail to give us the name of who it was that did what Jesus called, "a beautiful thing". She is simply "a woman". Her identity was forgotten. Have you experienced that yourself? You do something good and right and no one notices, you act courageously or generously, and it is ignored. Matthew and Mark couldn't recall who it was that Jesus found wonderful, but John did. He said it was Mary. Matthew though provides us with a key detail John and Mark don't include. **I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.**" (Matthew 26: 13 NIV) Did you notice this? What Mary did, forgotten as she was by Matthew and Mark, would be remembered and honored wherever people give their lives to Jesus.

I noticed this comment the Apostle Paul made to the church of Thessalonica. **We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.** (1 Thessalonians 1: 3 NIV) Think of that. Paul kept a mental note, that he returned to again and again as he prayed and thought about the Thessalonian Christians of the things they did, spurred on by their love for and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. If Paul could keep track of the good work the Thessalonians did, how much more so will Jesus. Note these precious words of God! **Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!** (Isaiah 49: 15 NIV) God does not forget you and He remembers the good you do. Why else would Jesus make this statement? **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."** (Matthew 6: 19-20 NIV) You do not earn salvation and eternal life by what you do. It is only through Christ dying on the Cross and being raised from the dead that you can have it. Faith in Him alone brings you salvation. But in a way we cannot quite grasp, we can store up for ourselves some sort of treasure in heaven that will bless us forever. The key point is that the good you do will be remembered by God. Each day, make it your goal to do something that will store up for yourself a treasure in heaven. Don't let a day go by that you do not do something that God with joy will remember. Make the most of the time you have been given. God remembers! And without realizing it, you will be great!