

A Study of Greatness

Yesterday my wife and I were privileged to spend the eightieth birthday with my father-in-law, Paul Wright. In the past two days I have noticed his step is a bit unstable, his endurance is abated and tonight he allowed my wife to drive us home from Branson back to their home in Kisse Mills, Missouri. God has been good to us to allow us to be with my wife's folks these past couple of days. I was asked by their pastor to speak at the mid-week service and one person came to mind, Barzillai. The Scriptures tell us: *"Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man"* (II Samuel 19:32). And so I spoke about the eighty year old Barzillai, in front of a modern Barzillai.

Old Barzillai's heart went out to his de-throned king when David was stranded in the wilderness avoiding the troops of Absalom. The Bible points out that Barzillai provided for the needs of the king and then God said he was a very great man. Barzillai's loyalty was not determined by popularity. His generosity was not politically motivated. And when he did good to his king it was not so that payback would be guaranteed to him. As a matter of fact, when he was offered the opportunity to live close to the king, the old man said, *"Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee"* (II Samuel 19:37). Take heed to the king's response: *"And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee"* (II Samuel 19:38). So the unselfish Barzillai blessed his king and in so doing, blessed his children. He truly was not in this life just to do "the getting" but he was very much in on "the giving."

I would like to bring three truths out about Bible greatness:

1. Greatness can be grown.

"And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great" (Genesis 26:13). The phrase "waxed great" comes from the Hebrew word, *gadal* which means to grow, become great or important, promote, to cause to grow. Although Isaac, of whom the Scripture speaks, was destined to greatness, the Bible shows that he exercised activity that promoted the greatness. Many lament that they are doomed to mediocrity, but the simple truth is, if you want to do great things for God you can! William Carey said, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

Let me encourage doing three beneficial exercises:

- (1) Think great thoughts: *"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he..."* (Proverbs 23:7).
- (2) Associate with great people: *"I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD..."* (Jeremiah 5:5).
- (3) Do great things: *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might..."* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

2. Great people make provision for God's plan and God's man.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread" (II Kings 4:8). In the same way that the great woman of Shunem made provision for God's man, Elisha and God's plan through him, so also Barzillai made provision and was sensitive to the plan that God still had for David. Although much of the kingdom had given up on David, God had not. Thank God

there are those in this life who are so attuned to God and His will that they don't always do that of which the public approves, but what pleases God. Luke 1:32 says of Jesus, "*He shall be great....*" It is not coincidental that the God Man, Jesus later said, "*...for I do always those things that please him*" (John 8:29). This is greatness!

There was a most touching incident in the life of President Harry Truman. A dear old friend who literally gave the President his start in politics had suffered an incredible demise politically and personally. During Truman's presidency his old friend died. Close friends of the president begged him not to say or do anything to show any remorse or loss over this man's death for fear that any association with him would hurt the President and his party considerably. The President however rose above the desire to curry favor the politically correct. He did the unspeakable! He attended his old friend's funeral. Greatness recognizes its roots and acknowledges a plan bigger than man's schemes that puts us where God wants us. "*A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men*" (Proverbs 18:16).

3. There is only one type of greatness that really matters.

"For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). This is one of the greatest compliments God ever gives a person in Scripture. The one being spoken of is John the Baptist. To be great in the sight of the Lord should be the goal of every Christian.

Before William Tyndale died at the stake in 1536, he prayed, "Lord! Open the king of England's eyes!" Critics of his translation of the New Testament pretended to find errors and heresies in it. Shortly before he died he wrote to John Frith, as follows, "I call to God to record against the day we appear before our Lord Jesus, that I never altered one syllable of God's Word against my conscience, nor would do this day, if all that is in earth, whether it be honor, pleasure or riches, might be given me." A man of true greatness has this attitude. He would be true to God though all the world stands against him. Greatness in God's eye is all that really matters.

- Pastor Pope -

Back to Pastor's Word