A Great Man

(Luther Blackmon)

The measure of a man is not his bank account or a string of degrees or his name in “Who’s Who.” After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9) I doubt he had a bank account or even an insurance policy. If the saints in Rome didn’t have the chance to give him a decent burial, it is likely that his tired old body would have been laid in a potter’s field. Great philanthropists are remembered because their names decorate a marble plaque on a building somewhere. Kings and queens become names in dusty history books, but Paul lives in the hearts of every reader of the New Testament.

He was not a great man by the standards of the world, but all the money in the world cannot buy, all the blood shed on the battlefields from the slaughter of the kings to the “Bay of Pigs” cannot give a man what Paul had when he marched out under blue Italian skies to keep his date with the herdsmen. This is the measure of greatness the fruits of a life spent in faithful service to God. A man is not great because of who he is or what he has, but because of what he does. Paul did thin. Paul was great because:

**He could change when he learned he was wrong**. From the greatest enemy of Christianity, he became its greatest advocate. “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities … And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry*” (Acts 26:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:12).

**He could feel godly sorrow for sin**. He never ceased to feel remorse at the thought of his early life when he persecuted the church. “*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 1:12-14). He mentioned it repeatedly. Some people are sorry they got caught or sorry they marred their reputations or just sorry. But only godly sorrow is being sorry that one has sinned against God. “*For the sorrow that is according to the will of god produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death*” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

**In his humility, Paul had self-respect**. He said to the high priest who commanded him to be smitten on the mouth, “*God shall smite thee; thou whited wall*” (Acts 23:3). He said to the men who were sent to release him from prison, after he had been treated shamefully, “*They have beaten us openly and uncondemned, being Romans…now do they thrust our privily? Nay, verily. But let them come themselves and fetch us out*” (Acts 16:37). Paul demanded respect. A man does not have to be a groveling coward to be a Christian.

**He was able to compare values and choose the best**. He disdained the advantages of birth and education to become a poor and, by the world, despised preacher. He said, “*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish so that I may gain Christ*” (Philippians 3:7-8).

**He never looked back**. “*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:13). Some members of the church are more concerned about what they left behind than what is before them. They have too much conscience to quit altogether and not enough to enjoy doing what is right. They are frustrated and always will be until they stop looking back at the world.

**He had a purpose**. He wasn’t just fighting the air. He was going somewhere and he knew where he was going and why. “*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14). Some are like young people on a hayride. They are just going, drifting aimlessly, as far as spiritual matters are concerned.

**He had faith in the outcome**. “*For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day*” (2 Timothy 1:12).

(Edited by Kevin Heaton)