



Superheroes of the Faith

What Makes for a True Hero?

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Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings in a single... well, okay, maybe not. In the world of comic books, heroes usually possess some extraordinary talent or ability; the ability to fly, or to lift a car off the ground with one hand, or the ability to scale tall buildings like a spider. Even in the Bible, we read about amazing feats accomplished by the heroes found on the pages there. The Red Sea was parted. The walls of Jericho fell. The sun stood still for a full day. The sick were healed, the hungry were fed, and the dead were raised to life.

But in the Bible, except for Jesus Himself, the people behind these extraordinary events were NOT remarkable people. In fact, many of the greatest heroes in the Bible were quite ordinary. How is it, then, that they were able to accomplish such great things? Hebrews chapter 11 speaks of heroes "who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies."

People from many different walks of life are featured in the Hebrews 11 "cloud of great witnesses," the "who's who" of true heroism, but just what is it that makes these men and women the heroes they are? Did they possess physical beauty? Some did, but not all. Did they possess superhuman strength? Were they great athletes? Public speakers? Great entertainers? Were they geniuses or billionaires or daredevils? On the whole, no.

Yet they are all listed, one after the other, in the Hebrews 11 hero hall of fame. And for all the heroes who are listed there, Hebrews 11 tells us that there are many other equally heroic people who aren't listed by name. But by the standards of our world, none of these people would qualify as heroes.

Moses would be villainized in our media for allowing God to use him to send plagues on Egypt and to drown the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Isaiah would be dismissed as a bigoted hate-monger spewing religious nonsense (as he was regarded in his own day). Jesus Himself would be seen as an intolerant, closed-minded troublemaker.

To the world, it is the rebels, the athletes, the self-absorbed movie stars and the party-animal hotel heiresses who are elevated to superstardom. Those who do things that are considered extraordinary live in the limelight of a world that is always looking for something spectacular to be awed by. And of course, once again, the world misses the point.

In Jesus' days on earth, people flocked to Him and admired Him because of the miracles He performed. He healed the sick, cured the blind and the crippled, and raised the dead, and the crowds said, "wow!" But of course, those who admired Jesus only for His miracles were missing the point. Aside from being God the Son, Jesus was remarkable in His life on earth because He flawlessly and faithfully obeyed His Father in all things.

And it wasn't the parting of the Red Sea that made Moses

a hero. After all, it really wasn't Moses who did that at all, but God working through him. Moses is a hero because he had faith in God and faithfully obeyed him; in spite of his own serious self-doubt. Hebrews chapter 11 makes no secret of what makes for a true hero. It's not about talent or smarts or station. It's not about sensationalism. The common denominator for all the great Bible heroes is their faith in God; a faith that leads to trust and obedience.

Being a true hero has nothing to do with what WE are able to do. Instead, it has everything to do with what GOD is able to do through us when we trust and obey Him. Our God chooses shepherds to be kings, fishermen to be Apostles, and common girls to save nations. And speaking for myself, that's what I love most about God. That God chooses the common, ordinary, unremarkable nobodies of the world to do His work is one of the most encouraging facts I can think of. By this wonderful fact, God tells us that He can use US—yes, even US—to do great things!

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

First Corinthians 1:26-29

In the end, very few of the people whom the world holds up as heroes will make the grade in God's eyes. In God's Kingdom, it will be the ordinary "Joes" who simply led quiet lives of faithful obedience to God, who answered His call and who obeyed even when it didn't seem to make sense who will be the heroes. It will be the pastor who continued to faithfully serve God even when his politicking elder board tried to oust him in a grab for power. It will be the lonely wife in an unhappy marriage who sticks it out and obeys God in righteousness. It will be the fourth grader who refuses to let his schoolteacher force him to deny Christ in the midst of humanistic teaching. It will be the forty-year old spinster who was on her knees for hours daily lifting up others in prayer. It will be the eighty-five year-old retiree from the big corporation, whose integrity in business was as well-known as his faith in God throughout his career.

Here, nobody will know their names. Nobody will know what they did. Here, they will vanish into obscurity. But in heaven, they will be among the heroes! They will be among those who faithfully, day in and day out, all their lives, trusted and obeyed God, just like the men and women listed in Hebrews chapter 11. Because of their faithfulness to God, they were each given the courage, the strength, the perseverance and the power to do great things for God. They were ordinary people, but by their faith, God made them heroes. And by OUR faith, He can make US into heroes too.