

Apparent Failure

Sometimes the price of faithfulness is apparent failure. Believers need to learn to see the “big picture” where God’s will is concerned. We are often tempted to want our legacy now rather than to wait for the Lord’s, “Well done” (Matt. 25:21). Notice some individuals in Scripture who succeeded in being faithful to God, even though they seemed to have failed.

Elijah – In a wicked and godless society Elijah boldly proclaimed God’s word. His very name means, “Jehovah is God,” and Elijah took advantage of every opportunity to show wicked Israel the errors of idolatry (cf. 1 Kings 18). After the great contest with the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mt. Carmel, Elijah hoped for a revival of interest in the One True God. He was bitterly disappointed, however, when most of Israel seemed unwilling to turn the conviction of Mt. Carmel into genuine repentance at home. On the run from Jezebel, Elijah was so discouraged that he begged God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). God strengthened Elijah and later taught him that there were still 7000 faithful in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Elijah’s faithfulness was a powerful influence in Israel even though he did not realize it.

Jeremiah – Through the reigns of four kings of Judah, Jeremiah consistently preached God’s message of repentance. Jeremiah described the loneliness of following God when others are uninterested: “I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers... I sat alone...” (Jer. 15:17). At one point Jeremiah lamented that he was reproached and derided daily because of God’s message, and he appeared ready to quit preaching altogether (Jer. 20:8-9). Other than his faithful helper Baruch, few seemed to heed the message of this man of God. Jeremiah’s ministry lasted more than 40 years and he seems to have produced few positive responses. Because of Jeremiah’s faithfulness, however, later generations compared him to Jesus Himself (Matt. 16:14). The popular speakers of Jeremiah’s day are forgotten now, but Jeremiah’s preaching still touches lives because his message came from God Himself.

Jesus – Jesus made faithfulness to God’s will His standard of success: “I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:29). The price of holding to this standard was apparent failure on a number of occasions. More than once, He moved on when He already had a large audience where He was (Mark 1:34-38). More than once He preached a message that was so offensive (note: His teaching was **never** unnecessarily offensive – cf. Eph. 4:15; Gal. 4:16) that His listeners, “went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66). In the shadow of the cross, He kept silent and became a sacrifice for the sake of others (Isa. 53:7-9). When Jesus died, even His disciples despaired because they believed He had failed (cf. Luke 24:20-21). However, a mere 50 days after His death, Peter boldly proclaimed that Jesus had NOT, in fact, failed. Rather, He had been faithful to the point of death, and as a result God had raised Him from the dead and highly exalted Him (Acts 2:24-36).

No man is a failure who is faithful to God.

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