

## **REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE GONE ON BEFORE**

Deuteronomy 32:7; Joshua 4:6-8; II Timothy 2:2; II Timothy 3:14-17  
Proverbs 13:20; Jeremiah 5:5

Charles Spurgeon said, "I always like to have a few good biographies handy, so that I can turn to the record of what the Lord has enabled his servants to do in the past." Spurgeon's ancestor, Job Spurgeon was a contemporary of John Bunyan and spent fifteen weeks in the Chelsford jail with nothing but straw bedding in the cold winter of 1673 for attending a Nonconformist meeting. Job Spurgeon left an impact on his children that trickled down to James Spurgeon who became the greatest influence on his grandson, Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon said of his grandfather, "I sometimes feel the shadow of his broad brim come over my spirit. I like to feel that I serve God 'from my fathers'!" referencing the type of hat worn in the days of the puritans and pilgrims.

On this Memorial Day weekend, I would like to discuss the impact of great men of God upon my life. Because this message is so deeply personal, I would say with the Apostle Paul, "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me" (II Corinthians 11:1). I was asked to speak at Crown College, which I recently did, on the subject of men who have influenced me. I had never delivered an entire message like this before. On this weekend as we think about those who gave their lives in our armed forces, I believe that it would be appropriate to remember those in the Lord's army who also left their mark for God and for good. Titus 2:10: "Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." God wants His people to be faithful in all things. The word adorn comes to us from the Greek word *kosmeo*; to put in proper order, i.e. decorate (literally or figuratively); specially, to garnish, trim; to embellish with honour. There are four areas I wish to disclose as I have observed first hand or by studying the lives of people used of God.

### **I. COMPASSION**

The man who most influenced my life is my own father, Dr. Julian Pope. He had an earned doctorate in Bible languages. Along with being a college and seminary professor, he was a missionary church planter. But it was his devout private life that most affected me. Once Dad and I were coming home from the feed store in rural Florida. As we were traveling back to Valrico, I noticed tears coming down my father's face. I said to my

usually rather cool tempered, phlegmatic father, “Dad, is everything okay?” With deep compassion, he said, “They’re going to Hell; they’re going to Hell and it’s breaking my heart.” Dad’s care for the lost was genuine.

Dr. Rice often addressed the subject of having a passion for souls. I heard him say, “Nothing is closer to the heart of Jesus than soul winning. Lost souls were on Christ’s heart as He died on Calvary.” I remember sitting close to Dr. Rice when he preached and seeing the tears run down his wrinkled cheeks like water in a canal as he preached with deep compassion. Psalm 126:5, 6; Jeremiah 9:1.

## II. PREACHING

Acts 10:42: “And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.” Romans 1:15: “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.” The word preach is translated from the Greek word *kerysso*, which means to proclaim after the manner of a herald.

There are three men that could be categorized as wordsmiths, in other words, men who could paint a picture with their speech. These were men reared in the days before television. They would preach with no screen behind them or graphic design. These three men were Robert G. Lee, Vance Havner and B. R. Lakin. Here’s a paragraph taken from one of Dr. Lee’s sermons: “Christ who in eternity rested motherless upon the Father’s bosom and in time rested fatherless upon a woman’s bosom, clasping the Ancient of Days had become the Infant of Days. What deep descent from the heights of glory to the depths of shame; from the wonders of heaven to the wickedness of earth; from exaltation to humiliation; from the throne to the tree; from dignity to debasement; from worship to wrath; from the halls of heaven to the nails of earth; from the coronation to the curse; from the glory place to the gory place! In Bethlehem, humility and glory in their extremes were joined. Born in a stable! Cradled in a cattle trough! Wrapped in swaddling clothes of poverty! No room for Him who made all rooms! Not place for Him who made and knows all places! Oh, deep humiliation of the Creator – born of the creature, woman! But in His descent was the dawn of mercy. Because we cannot ascend to Him, He descends to us.”

Dr. Havner tells the story of boys playing marbles outside a diamond mine in South Africa. The owner came by and saw the boys in play and asked what they were doing. They answered, “We’re playing marbles.” The owner said, “Boys, do you realize that you are playing marbles with

diamonds?” Dr. Havner used his words to paint the picture that many in the church today have the avenue of prayer and the inspired Scriptures and we don’t know what we have; we are in essence playing marbles with diamonds.

### III. BLAMELESS

I Timothy 3:2: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”

There is not enough room to write of the men and illustrations of the moral integrity of great men that I have known. Let me focus on one subject that doesn’t receive enough attention, i.e. the fidelity of great men to their wife. So often we hear of people in ministry who were not consistent in living to the high standard of holiness. The phrase “...the husband of one wife...” means “a one-woman man.” Soon after my wife and I were married we spent the better part of a day with Dr. Robert G. Lee. When we entered his home he had my wife, Barbara sit in “Lady Lee’s” chair (the affectionate name for his dear wife). He said to us, “There has never been a woman that loved her husband better than Lady Lee loved me and there never has been a man that loved a woman better than I loved her.” As we walking through Dr. Lee’s home on Stonewall Street in Memphis, we came to a large painting. He took me by one hand and Barbara by the other hand and said, “Do you know who is in that painting?” I said, “I believe the man in the background with his hand on the doorknob is Napoleon.” He confirmed that and then informed us that the lady in the foreground was Josephine. He said with conviction, “That painting is portraying Napoleon leaving his wife Josephine.” Then he said, “Napoleon experienced his Waterloo right after he left his wife, Josephine.” Then Dr. Lee told us forcefully, “Whenever a man loses the great love of his life, he finds his Waterloo.”

The great missionary, Rick Martin asked me, “What is the greatest thing your dad ever taught you?” Without hesitation, I answered, “Obedience to the unenforceable.” In other words, do right when there is no one around to make you do right. Who you are in the dark is who you really are. What you or don’t do when no one is watching reflects your character more than anything you do on purpose publicly. Paul put it like this in Philippians 2:12, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Before a man betrays his marriage vows or any defiant act of unholy behavior, he disobeys God when by himself.

#### IV. CHRISTOCENTRIC

I Corinthians 2:2: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." My favorite Spurgeon story of all time is when an American businessman went to England after being admonished by his American pastor that he must hear Spurgeon, the prince of preachers. The businessman assured his pastor he would indeed. The first Sunday, the businessman got to the Metropolitan Tabernacle early only to find that every seat had already been taken. He got there earlier the second Sunday, only to find no seats again. The businessman had only one Sunday left in England, so he arrived at the Tabernacle even earlier still, but alas, to no avail; no available seats. Upon finding this out, a dear deacon told the American he could have his seat, provided he tell the deacon how he liked his pastor when the service is over. The American happily agreed. After the service was over the deacon approached the businessman, "How did you like our pastor?" The businessman said, "When your pastor walked out, I was surprised at how fat he was, quite unbecoming for a man of God." Then, he continued, "Your pastor began to lead singing, and I thought he should get someone else to do that." Finally the businessman said, "Then your pastor began to preach and I thought to myself, I am not hearing anything that I have not already heard from other preachers in America. But then, about mid-way in the service, something happened. I no longer saw Mr. Spurgeon; all I saw was Jesus."

Christ, the central message should be so apparent that the preacher disappears. Matthew 17:8: "And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."

-Pastor Pope-