

Living My Last Year

A New Year's Resolution

On April 9, 1945, a thirty-nine-year-old pastor, theologian, and spy was executed in the Flössenbuerg concentration camp by the Third Reich—his name was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was little known outside of Germany. He was never the pastor of a large church. He never held the position of president at a world renowned seminary or university. He was never the official guest of a head of state, and the literary works he produced only became well known after his death. Yet today we still read about him. Students still study him. Historians still write about him.

Eleven years later, on January 8, 1956, an even younger twenty-eight-year-old missionary would be killed in the jungles of Central America for trying to reach lost souls with the gospel of Jesus Christ—his name was Jim Elliot. However, unlike Bonhoeffer, he had no doctorate degree. He had no seminary training, and he produced no literary works. Yet today we still read about him. Students still study him. Historians still write about him.

Neither one accomplished great things by the world's standard. Neither one held a position of great power or influence. Yet both these men, and countless others like them, will forever be remembered in the annals of history. We are fascinated with people like Bonhoeffer and Elliot because we see in them what we long to see in ourselves—a desire to live for God's glory with reckless disregard for ourselves. Elliot's now famous quote sums up well the driving force behind his life—“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Bonhoeffer would have likely agreed with this statement as is evidenced by his life and death. However, in many of us—if not most of us—there lies deep within the recesses of our psyche a desire to see our name carved into the front of a building, to see a relief of our bust on the side of a mountain, to be remembered by histo-

ry beyond our children and grandchildren. The irony is that people like Bonhoeffer and Elliot, who inspire us most, are the ones who cared least about being remembered by history. They simply strove to live for God's glory and to live out their convictions.

In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) we read the story of a master who is preparing to go on a long journey. During his preparation he calls to himself three of his servants and entrusts each of them with a certain number of talents (a monetary unit). To one he gives five, to the second he gives two, and to the third he gives one (v.15). In the parable the master represents God. The servants represent people. And the talents represent all that God gives us. Limited space prevents the full exposition of this parable, but there are two important points worth noting.

First, notice the reason each servant is not given the same number of talents. The master gave “*to each according to his ability*” (v.15). We may long to be like Bonhoeffer or Elliot or to be the next Charles Spurgeon or Billy Graham but God has not wired us all the same. Some are given the ability to be effective third grade Sunday school teachers while others are given the ability to be founders of worldwide non-profit organizations. The difference between Billy Graham and Jim Elliot is not one of wise decisions and favorable circumstances but rather of God's providential placement of each within the stream of redemptive history. Our heavenly Father gives to each one according to his or her ability.

Second, when the master lauds the two servants who turned a 100% profit for their master what is conspicuously missing from his praise is the word *successful*. “Well done, good and faithful servant” (vv.21, 23). By any financial standard the two servants would be considered successful; however, the master does not extol their success but praises them for being “*good and faithful*”. They strove to do what was right and they strove to be faithful with



what their master had entrusted to them—relationships, possessions, ability, time.

In the next parable regarding the sheep and the goats, the reader is presented with a portrait about the final day of judgment (Matthew 25). In that day the Son of Man will separate the peoples of the world as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats. He places the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. From v.34 and v.46 we see that the sheep inherit the kingdom while the goats are sent away into eternal punishment. The difference between the sheep and the goats is not what they achieved during their lifetime but how they spent their time in relation to their fellow human being. In other words, while the goats were not spending their time feeding those who were hungry, giving water to those who were thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing those who were naked, mending those who were sick, and visiting those in prison—*what were they doing?* Presumably they were not doing that which was most pleasing and glorifying to God.

Death comes to all of us and we have little control over our abilities and circumstances. We have much control over the way we spend our time. Time is the most valuable resource we have. Once gone it cannot be replaced. Thus, in the end all that really matters is not whether or not we have made our mark on history or whether or not people will read about us when we're gone, but rather that when we reach the point of death we will be able to say to ourselves in good conscience: “I did all I could for the glory of God, to minister to his people, and to reach the lost with the good news of Jesus Christ.” For that reason I have adopted just one New Year's resolution—to *live this year as though it were my last*. No one is guaranteed next year, next month or even tomorrow. What we have is the here and now. “Teach us [Lord] to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

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