

November 22, 2009

THANKFUL FOR WHAT NOBODY EVER TAUGHT YOU (by Dr. Stan Reeder)

Hebrews 11:23-29

INTRODUCTION:

Immediately after church one Sunday a young boy exclaimed to his mother that he had decided to become a minister. “Well now that is fine, but what led you to that decision?” “Well, I know I have to go to church anyway, so I figure it would be a lot better to be the one up there yelling that to be the one down here listening.”

A walk through the graveyard in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia

During a summer vacation to Nova Scotia on the east coast of Canada, we spent an afternoon in Annapolis Royal. Annapolis Royal is the oldest permanent European settlement in Canada. It was founded in 1605 by the French explorer Samuel de Champlain. Today, the ruins of the original fort still stand. We actually stood in a prison that housed criminals almost 400 years ago.

Beside the ruins of the fort is the graveyard. The boys and I went right to work checking out the dates and epitaphs on one of the oldest graveyards in North America. Several of the headstones dated into the 1600's. I remember one family area.

A tombstone marked the grave of one child who died in 1712 – 6 months old.

Beside it stood the marker of a sister – 9 years old: 1714.

A larger stone marked their mother who died in 1715 – 32 years old.

Dated within 6 months of the death of the wife and mother was the last stone on this family's sight: the husband and father. This man had lost his two children and his dear wife all in the span of three years. I called the boys over to look at the stones and the loving remarks on them. This poor man died of a broken heart.

You can tell quite a bit from the messages on a tombstone.

A lonely widow apparently composed this epitaph in a Vermont cemetery:

Sacred to the memory of my husband Jon Barnes

Who died January 3, 1803

His comely young widow, aged 23, has many qualifications of a good wife,

And yearns to be comforted.

In a Georgia cemetery:

I told you I was sick!

The grave of Ellen Shannon in Girard, Pennsylvania, reads almost like a warning label:

Who was fatally burned

March 21, 1870

By the explosion of a lamp filled with

“R. E. Danforth's Non-Explosive Burning Fluid.”

And what does the message on the grave of Ezekiel Aikle in East Dalhousie Cemetery, Nova Scotia tell you about Ezekiel?

*Here lies Ezekiel Aikle
Aged 102
The Good Die Young*

You have likely heard the creative advertisement slogan used by Tombstone Pizza:

“What do you want on your tombstone?”

You can gather quite a bit about the way one lived from an epitaph. What do you want to be written about you on your tombstone? How are others going to sum up your life? Are you living in such a way that the epitaph to describe your life would be what you would want it to be?

In a sense, Hebrews 11:24-29 is Moses’ epitaph. It was written as a summary of Moses’ – Mr. Nobody’s - life. It was written 1300 years after he died. Moses’ epitaph makes us “Thankful For What Nobody Ever Taught You.”

THE LESSONS NOBODY EVER TAUGHT YOU:

1. Faith sacrifices for the eternal (Hebrews 11:24-26).

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Life is full of choices. Are you choosing from the perspective of the short term in this world . . . or are you looking ahead to the reward?

Jack Welch is recognized as one of the greatest business leaders of the past 100 years. News reports on his most recent divorce have shed light on Welch’s practice. During an appearance at a public forum, Welch was asked what he had learned from a brush with death seven years earlier: Had he had an epiphany during his heart surgery? His answer: “I learned I didn’t spend enough money.” When pressed – they thought he was joking – he added that, after his bypass surgery, he vowed never again to drink wine that cost less than one hundred dollars a bottle – and he was completely serious.

What a sad answer. What is even sadder is that Welch is hardly unique in this regard. The past decade was characterized by a frenzied consumption, in which your choice of olive oil, kitchen gadgets, underclothes, and cars became a “spiritual” matter. Are we living for this world and what we can get and enjoy?... or are we living for eternal reward?

Moses' epitaph reveals his choice: ***He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (Hebrews 11:25b).***

Friends, there is no debate as to whether there is pleasure in sin ... it gives a burst of satisfaction ... but don't forget that last phrase: ***for a short time.*** When the pleasure vanishes, as it surely will, it leaves behind an ocean of pain, heartache, and regret.

Young people ... keep your way pure ... don't be seduced down Satan's sinful way. You can keep your way pure. Why did Moses make the choice? ***Because he was looking ahead to his reward (Hebrews 11:26b).***

2. Faith perseveres the temporal (Hebrews 11:27).

Moses had a very difficult life. He spent the first 40 years in extravagant opulence and the last 80 years in desert wanderings only to die alone on Mount Pisgah. The Scripture tells us in Deuteronomy 34:6 – ***to this day no one knows where his grave is (Deuteronomy 34:6).*** Tough way to live ... from riches to rags ... yet he persevered.

I've heard it said:

*When I feel blue, I just start breathing again
Some of you had a birthday this past week and it's easy to get discouraged about our age:
I'm not 42, I'm 39.95 plus shipping and handling!*

Let's look to the Word to receive help for persevering the temporal...

The Hebrew epitaph reads: ***he persevered because he saw him who was invisible (Hebrews 11:27).***

I love the story of Tommy that James Dobson tells:

When I first began driving to my hospital office, I noticed a nice-looking young man who invariably stood at the window of an old apartment house, which is located across the street from the doctors' parking lot. Morning after morning this same man, who I would judge to have been in his middle forties, appeared at the same open window as I drove past. He was always there when I went home at the end of the day as well. I began to wave or smile to the man in the window, and he would return my greeting with a similar gesture. Though it seems unlikely, we developed a friendship... without a single conversation between us.

My curiosity finally compelled me to get better acquainted with the man behind the smile. One noontime I walked from my office to the building where my congenial friend lived and climbed a dark stairway to the second floor. I knocked on the door, and it was opened by "the man in the window." He introduced himself as Tommy and invited me to come into his two-room apartment. During the next hour he told me his story. He had been a successful executive until devastated by a massive coronary thrombosis about six years earlier. His heart ailments were compounded by emphysema and other physical disorders, which prevented his engaging in any form of work... Tommy, I learned, was rarely able to leave that tiny apartment. He was not

married and seemed to have no relatives or close friends. His situation was not unlike being sentenced to virtual solitary confinement in a two-room cell.

The beautiful part of Tommy's story is how he chose to cope with his personal tragedy. He had every reason in the world to be depressed and despondent, but he exuded... [gratitude] and optimism....Tommy had obviously made up his mind to...[live life with a thankful disposition].

For something more than fifteen years, Tommy stood his watch above the noise and traffic of the street, and we remained good friends. I stopped my car beneath his window on January 3 this year, to greet him after I had been gone for a brief Christmas vacation. Without thinking, I asked him, "Did you have a good holiday?"

Tommy replied, "It was great."

I learned later that he had spent the entire Christmas season in the solitude of that room, watching the harassed shoppers and commuters below him.

A few weeks later, Tommy failed to appear at his usual place at the window. The second morning he was absent again, and both the shades were drawn. I learned from the parking lot attendant that Tommy had collapsed and died during the previous weekend. My friend was gone. His funeral had already been held, though I doubt if anyone attended it. Now as I drive past the apartment building each morning, I can hear Tommy saying the last words he ever spoke to me, "It was great."

Our disposition in the face of temporal trials is our choice. Moses chose to persevere through temporal troubles. You can too! The secret to persevering the temporal is a thankful disposition.

Helen Keller said:

When one door to happiness closes, another door always opens, but we often look so long and so regretfully at the door that closes that we fail to see the door that opens.

When you feel like quitting remember what Nobody taught you: Faith perseveres the temporal by a thankful disposition.

3. Faith obeys the unusual (Hebrews 11:28).

Moses sacrificed for the eternal; Moses persevered in the temporal; and Moses obeyed the unusual.

Think of the faith required on Moses' part to obey God's direction...Just to **feed** the Israelites in the desert required 1500 tons of food per day or 2 freight trains each 1 mile long.

The **wood** required for cooking and warmth at night would take another two freight trains.

The **water** to drink and wash up with totaled 11 million gallons per day or a freight train of tanker cars – 1,800 miles long!!!

I'd say he had faith before he started out into the desert!

Our Hebrew epitaph reads: *By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel (Hebrews 11:28).*

Act as if there has never been a Passover, because when he did it, there never had been

God's promise was that the destroyer would Passover those homes protected by the blood of the lamb.

There's Moses out there painting blood on the door frame and someone walks by.

"What are you doing Moses."

"I'm keeping the destroyer away from my home." [Music theme from Twilight Zone]

"Oh year, sure, ri-I-I-I-I-I-gth!

Can you imagine the looks these Hebrews were getting.

"Well, I know it sounds unusual, but God says if we sprinkle blood here, death won't come in."

"Oooooooo. Sounds so scary. Look at me! I'm tremblin' all over."

Didn't matter how odd the request, Moses obeyed the unusual.

4. Faith accomplishes the impossible (Hebrews 11:29).

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned (Hebrews 11:29).

If the people had of crossed the Red Sea, double file – the line of people would have been 800 miles long and it would have taken 35 days.

To **cross the Red Sea** in one night required that these 2-3 million people walk 5,000 abreast in a swath of dry land that was 3 miles wide.

When was the last time you attempted the impossible? God's way is for us to attempt things that we have no hope of accomplishing on our own.

You are using one of two formula's in life:

Here is the first formula:

$$\text{My abilities} + \text{experience} + \text{training} + \text{My personality and appearance} = \text{My accomplishments}$$

As long as you are using that math you are totally discounting the teaching of Scripture. Zechariah 4:6 says – *Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.* The

Spirit of God is exactly what Jesus' promises believers, and listen what happens when that Spirit fills our lives: ***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Acts 1:8).***

The Scriptural formula is:

*My willingness and weakness +
God's will and power =
The miracles he would work through me everyday.*

When was the last time you attempted something in which you knew the result would be failure unless the Holy Spirit's power miraculously worked?

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Go out today, this week, anticipating the great things God would do through your life! Enter into each day with supernatural enthusiasm, boldness and power in the expectation that God is going to give you divine appointments to do His wonderful work.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

They can conquer who believe they can.

Henry Ford said:

If you think you can't, you're right... If you think you can, you're still right!

APPLICATION:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

This is what the ancients were commended for - Hebrews 11:1

The faith perspective is what God loves: ***well done good and faith – full servant (Matt 25:21)!***

Faith sacrifices for the eternal. Is there a day that the Lord is calling you away from and asking you to give up the pleasures for his sake and for his way because of eternity?

Faith perseveres the temporal through a thankful disposition. . . Is there something that would seem legitimate to quit but the Lord is saying . . . it is only temporal – persevere?

Faith obeys the unusual . . . is there anything that you have sensed God's prompting toward but you've been saying . . . too weird Lord?

Faith accomplishes the impossible . . . What formula are you using for your daily life?

Is there anything about which the Lord is calling you to have a faith-perspective? Will you outline the Lord's direction below?