

Quiet Heroes

The scriptures are rich in stories of great heroes, both men and women, who made up a great cloud of witnesses². But when the Christ came, He did not choose known heroes to gather around Him as did His predecessor David³. He gathered a group of the most regular and initially non-heroic people that He came into contact with. But He turned them into a powerful force.

I was one of those who was drawn to Him and began to follow Him. After He had given Himself for mankind and then returned to heaven, I began to realize what a hero He had been and forever was.

But I also wondered who He saw as heroes. Did He think that David was a great hero, in facing and killing the giant Goliath⁴? When I traveled with Him, He was more interested in quiet heroes⁵. One that He paid the greatest tribute to was the widow who, with her two mites, gave all that she had to live on⁶. John the Baptist was another quiet hero, who stepped back to let Christ move forward⁷. There were others who supported Him in many quiet ways⁸.

He did send disciples out on what one might call heroic missions, as when He sent groups of 12⁹ and 72¹⁰ out to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. He praised them for their work, claiming that He saw Satan fall in defeat¹¹. But when Peter swung his sword in an attempt to spark the birth of the kingdom¹², Jesus stopped the action that did not fit His plan.

Somehow in Christ the idea of hero underwent a transition, from warrior to quiet (perhaps especially suffering) servant. We still battle Satan, with non-traditional weapons¹³, but it is always in the shadow of God's brilliant power. On our own, we tend to fight imaginary foes¹⁴, or simply the wrong foes – we try to become heroes in our own minds. But the quiet hero is what God always wants us to be. I want to hear Him say at the final judgment, "Well done, my good and faithful servant! You are my hero!"¹⁵

Many do not understand how important this is. Many Pharisees, for instance, felt the need to display their self-perceived heroic nature with a show of great fanfare, as though sounding a trumpet¹⁶. They were known for always acting out righteousness to be seen by men¹⁷: in their public prayers, giving to the needy, fasting, seating position, titles, appearances¹⁸. Jesus made it clear that they received their due, and that God knows what we do in secret and will reward us accordingly¹⁹.

It was clear that Jesus did not see the Pharisees (in general) as heroes of the kingdom. A hero thinks of others and helps them to carry their burdens (quietly)²⁰, but the religious "leaders" had a way of adding to the burden without helping at all²¹. And speaking of noise, our brother Paul wrote that this is all we are if we do not have love²².

Quietness was a significant part of Jesus' method as He presented His message. He tried to keep much of His (early) work quiet ("don't tell anyone"²³) to keep His following growing in a manageable way. He was quiet, but definitely not invisible. He pointed to God²⁴, and only wanted attention on Himself to help draw people to God. And He advised us to give to needy so quietly that even our left hand doesn't know what our right hand is doing²⁵.

He told about those who would stand before Him and He would praise those who had quietly (without thinking of their own glory) had been heroes²⁶. He said that the greatest among us would be a (quiet) servant, for those who made noise to draw attention to themselves would be silenced, and those who were quiet heroes would be exalted²⁷. So I began asking myself, was I trying to be a loud hero or a quiet hero?

Jesus is a quiet hero who was willing to empty Himself and die on the cross because He loved others. He was a louder hero when He was resurrected, and ascended up into heaven to stand at the right hand of God. The main question I have to ask now when I discuss the Kingdom is: Is Christ your kind of hero? And will you be His?

... all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

1. Nouwen, Henri J. M., Letters to Marc About Jesus: Living a Spiritual Life in a Material World, p.68
2. Look at the cloud of witnesses described in Hebrews 11
3. 1 Samuel 22:1-3
4. 1 Samuel 17
5. consider Obadiah, who hid two groups of fifty prophets in caves, while the big prophet Elijah won the battle of the altar and then ran for his life and was ready to quit; also think of the widow who prepared the last meal for Elijah, and the widow who prepared a room for Elisha
6. Luke 21:1-4
7. John 1:19ff
8. remember that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, among other women supported Him in His ministry (Luke 8:1-4)
9. Matthew 10:5
10. Luke 10:1
11. Luke 10:18
12. John 18:10
13. 2 Corinthians 10:4
14. a later generation referred to it as fighting windmills
15. Matthew 25:21
16. Matthew 6:2
17. Matthew 6:1, Matthew 23:5
18. from Matthew 6 and Matthew 23
19. Matthew 6:6
20. Galatians 6:2
21. Luke 11:46
22. 1 Corinthians 13:1
23. see Matthew 8:4, Matthew 17:9, Mark 7:36, Luke 4:41
24. Mark 10:18
25. Matthew 6:3
26. see Matthew 25:31-46
27. Matthew 23:11