

(The Full Gospel) 17. the Influence of One Man

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical role of one faithful man in fulfilling God's purposes throughout biblical history and in the church today.

Scripture: Genesis 6:8, Exodus 12:40, Joshua 3:7, Ezekiel 22:30, Daniel 1:8, Acts 20:29-30, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 2 Timothy 2:20-21, James 5:16, Revelation 2:1-7

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Leadership"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical role of one faithful man in fulfilling God's purposes, as illustrated through biblical figures like Noah, Moses, and Paul. He explains that while God can use anyone for minor tasks, He seeks those who have been tested and proven for significant assignments. Poonen warns against being merely used by God, urging believers to strive to be valuable vessels for His work. He highlights that God's work often hinges on the faithfulness of one individual, and that true leadership requires a deep commitment to God's will. The sermon calls for believers to cleanse themselves and be ready for God's calling in a world that desperately needs uncompromising leaders.

Transcript

"I searched for ONE MAN among them who should build up the wall and stand before Me....but I did not find even one man" (Ezekiel 22:30).

God has many tasks to accomplish in this world, and all of them are not of equal importance. For the unimportant tasks, He may use anyone. But for the really important tasks, any man will not do. For such vital tasks, God has to have a man who has been tested and proved through many trials and testings. And if such a man is not immediately available, then God will wait until such a man IS available. God does not do His work with the best available person, as men do.

We use a matchstick to light a fire. But then we throw the matchstick away, because it is no longer of any value to us. There are some people whom God uses like that. He discards them, after He has used them, because they are not valuable to Him. We should never therefore desire to be merely USED by God. We should seek to be valuable to Him.

"In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, some to honour and some to dishonour. If a man cleanses himself, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified, useful to the Master" (2 Timothy 2:20, 21).

A man may use vessels of different materials in his work. But he will not value the earthen pots and the wooden crates as much as he values the gold and silver vessels. In the same way, although all who are born again may be equally children of God, every child of God is NOT equally useful to Him in His work. Although there is no partiality with God, yet every vessel is not a sanctified, useful vessel. God prizes only very few, because they alone seek His will and His glory wholeheartedly.

This is why we must cleanse ourselves constantly from "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (in other words, from everything that is unlike Christ within us), if we are to be valuable vessels to God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Once a person becomes a valuable vessel, God will depend on him greatly for His work. If such a man fails God, God's work will be halted temporarily, until God can find another man whom He can use.

In the history of the world, of Israel and of the church, we see a number of examples of how God has very often been dependent on just ONE man in a particular situation to accomplish His purposes. But one man with God is always a majority.

Noah

When the whole world was filled with wickedness and rebellion against God, in Noah's time, although there were eight God-fearing people on the earth, yet the fulfillment of God's purposes depended entirely on the faithfulness of just one man, Noah.

Noah was the only man who found favour in God's eyes at that time (Genesis 6:8). If that one man had been unfaithful to God, the entire human race would have been wiped out, and none of us would have been alive today!! We can certainly thank God that Noah remained faithful.

Jesus said that the last days would be like the days of Noah. The sexual perversion and violence of the days of Noah would characterise the last days too. This is the time that we are living in today. And so, uncompromising men like Noah are what God needs even today.

Moses

When the Israelites were in Egypt, God could not set them free from their slavery until He had found a man who was fit to represent Him. And God was prepared to wait till such a man was ready.

God's had planned for the Israelites to be in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13). But they finally stayed for 430 years (Exodus 12:40). Why did they have to stay 30 years longer than God's perfect plan for them?

It was certainly not because God made a mistake. God never makes any mistakes. But the man who was to be their leader was not yet ready. God had probably planned for Moses to be ready within ten years of his going into the wilderness. But instead Moses took forty years to complete his spiritual education there, under God's hand. So the Israelites had to remain in slavery for another 30 years.

Once when Moses was away from the Israelites for just 40 days, all 2 million of them went astray (Exodus 32). It took just a few days for a whole nation to forsake the true God and to go astray worshipping idols, once God's man was away from the scene. Those Israelites had seen amazing miracles before their very eyes. But the memory of those miracles could not preserve the Israelites from worshipping idols. Only the

strict leadership of one man of God could do that!

Aaron was their temporary leader, while Moses was away on the mountain. But although Aaron may have been a good, God-fearing man, he could not keep the people devoted to God. Obviously he was a man who sought to please the masses, and the people took advantage of him.

There are many Christian leaders like Aaron today, who imagine themselves to be serving the Lord. They are good, upright people, who live God-fearing lives. But God cannot use them to keep His church pure, because they yield to the will of the people easily. God looks for men like Moses, even today, to lead His church in its battle against Satan.

Joshua

Joshua was another man whom the Lord exalted and stood by. The Lord told Joshua when Israel reached the border of Canaan, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you" (Joshua 3:7).

The Lord had already trained Joshua, for 40 years during the wilderness journey. Now He exalted him to leadership and stood by him just like He had stood by Moses. The Lord even stopped the earth from rotating on its own axis for a number of hours once, to support Joshua. The Bible says that "there was no day like that before it or after it, when the Lord listened to the voice of a man" (Joshua 10:14).

Once God has chosen a man to represent Him, it is amazing what miracles He will do to manifest to others that He stands by him.

We read that the Israelites "served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua" (Judges 2:7).

Joshua's influence was so powerful on the Israelites that they did not dare to worship idols during his lifetime and during the lifetime of his fellow-elders. But once Joshua died, Israel backslid badly.

Such is the effect of the life of one man of God.

Elijah

Consider another time in Israel's history, when Ahab made everyone worship Baal. There were 7000 men at that time in Israel, who refused to worship Baal (1 Kings 19:18). That was undoubtedly a bold and creditable stand to take. But such a testimony was still a negative one: They did NOT worship idols. This is like the negative testimony that many believers have today - they do not smoke, they do not gamble, etc.

But God could not use even one of these 7000 men to accomplish His purposes in Israel at that time. For that, God needed an Elijah. Ahab was not afraid of these 7000 "believers". But he was afraid of Elijah. These 7000 men no doubt prayed to God; but their prayers could not bring fire down from heaven. It was the prayer of Elijah, that did that.

The prayers of all believers are not equal in their effect in God's presence. The Bible says in relation to Elijah, that "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." (James 5:17, 16).

One man single-handedly, turned a whole nation back to God, routed the forces of wickedness and killed all the prophets of Baal.

It is through one faithful man, and not through a multitude, that God's purposes are accomplished, even today.

Elisha

There were fifty "sons of the prophets" (Bible-school students) in Elijah's time who were all hoping to be prophets in Israel one day. But the Spirit of God bypassed all of them and came upon Elisha, who was not a "son of a prophet" (2 Kings 2:7, 15). Elisha was known in Israel only as a servant - "one who used to pour water on Elijah's hands" (2 Kings 3:11).

When the army of the king of Aram attacked Israel, none of these fifty Bible-scholars could protect Israel - for although they may have studied the Law of Moses in their Bible-school, they did not know God. Only Elisha, who was the only man in Israel who was in touch with God, could forewarn the nation as to where exactly the enemy would attack.

Today also, the main function of a prophet is similar: To warn God's people in advance of where Satan will attack them. One prophet like Elisha, in a church today, can save God's people from spiritual calamity more than fifty preachers ("sons of the prophets"). Bible-knowledge is of no use if a man cannot hear the Spirit's voice. Only a man who can hear God's voice can save a church from Satan's schemes and attacks.

The prophets of old were also called "SEERS" ("those who can SEE into the future with God-given vision" - 1 Samuel 9:9). They knew where the enemy would attack, and could foresee the dangers of taking a particular course of action. The church today greatly needs such seers.

Daniel

When God wanted to bring the Israelites out of Egypt into Canaan. He needed a man. He found Moses. When He wanted to bring the Jews out of Babylon into Jerusalem, He needed another man. He found Daniel.

The length of the captivity in Babylon (70 years) had been predicted just like the length of the captivity in Egypt had been predicted. But this time (unlike as in Moses' time), there wasn't a delay of even a single day in God's plan being fulfilled - because God's man was ready on time.

Daniel had been faithful from his youth and had passed every test with flying colours. As a young teenager in Babylon, he took a firm stand for the Lord. "He determined in his heart that he would not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8) - a good verse for all young people to remember.

Whereas all the other young Jews readily ate the food served on the king's table for fear of the king (food that God had forbidden in Leviticus), Daniel alone refused to eat it. There were three other young men at that table that day, who saw Daniel take a stand, and joined him. Daniel and those three men then became a powerful influence for God in Babylon.

70 years later, when Daniel was nearly 90 years old, his prayers triggered the movement of the Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem.

Today also there is a movement of God's people from spiritual Babylon (the false church) towards spiritual Jerusalem (the Body of Christ). And for such a movement too God needs men.

There are many today, who are like Daniel's three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Daniel 1:11). They are eager to stand for the Lord, but they don't have the courage to do so on their own. They are waiting for a Daniel to lead them. And so God is again looking for Daniels.

Paul

Under the new covenant, God desires to use ALL His children - and not just one man here and there. This is possible however, only if every believer lives in the new-covenant. But right from the days of the apostles, we see that very few believers enter the new covenant. Most believers live lives defeated by sin, are occupied with a "health-and-wealth gospel", need a pastor as a mediator between them and Christ, etc., etc. They still live in many ways exactly like the Old Testament Israelites.

And therefore, just as in Old Testament times, God is again dependent on one man in many a situation, to keep Satan out of His church.

Consider what happened in Ephesus: Paul spent more time there than in any other church. Every single day, for 3 years, he preached the whole counsel of God there (Acts 20:31). It was the most privileged of all the churches. The high standard of the teachings in Paul's letter to them indicates that it was a spiritually-minded church too. So, if there was one church where believers should have entered in great numbers into new-covenant life, it should have been this church at Ephesus. But alas, it was not so. Not even the elders there had entered into such a life.

Paul told those elders when he was leaving them, "I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30).

As long as Paul was personally present in the church at Ephesus, no wolf could enter it, because Paul was a watchful shepherd of the flock and a strict doorkeeper of the Lord's house. The elders who were seeking their own, also could not draw away any disciples after them, as long as Paul was there - because they were powerless in Paul's presence.

Paul knew the spiritual condition of the elders. And so he knew that as soon as he left Ephesus, the church would be overrun by the wolves and self-seeking elders - and the testimony would be corrupted. When we read the Second Letter to the Ephesians (Revelation 2:1-7), we see that the church there did backslide, exactly as Paul had predicted.

Who then had preserved the church in Ephesus in purity during those three years? **JUST ONE MAN - PAUL.** Satan was afraid of Paul, but he knew he could handle all the other elders in Ephesus quite easily!

This has also been the history of every single group that God has raised up anywhere in the world, during the last 20 centuries.

When we look back at the history of the church during the last 20 centuries what do we see? At a particular time, in a particular place, God raises up a man to restore to the church, truths from His Word that had lain buried for ages. God trains such a man in secret, and then brings him forth into a public ministry. Most believers hate this man and call him a heretic and reject him as a false prophet. But a few, who have ears to hear the truth, recognise God's anointing on him, realise that what he is saying is the truth of God, and join him. Thus through these few, a testimony is raised up for the Lord, in that generation. Things go well as long as the man himself is alive. But once he is dead, things begin to

decline, and very soon this new group also drifts and soon becomes a part of Babylon, like all the other denominations.

Not a single leader in the history of Christianity has been able to produce a second generation of leaders who have had the same knowledge of God that he himself had. Each of them could serve only their own generation and pass on. In the next generation, God has always had to make a fresh beginning to raise up a pure testimony for His Name.

This is what has happened time and again throughout church history - whether we consider the history of the larger denominations or the smaller groups.

Today, even though all these groups may still proclaim the same doctrines that their founders proclaimed, yet every single one of them has drifted away from the knowledge and life of God that their founders had. They have ALL fallen over either the one cliff of worldliness and compromise, or the opposite cliff of Pharisaism and legalism.

But God needs a pure testimony for His Name in EVERY generation. And He will not leave Himself without a witness even in our generation. Will you pay the price to be wholly available to God in this generation?

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