

Perspective

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Standing in the Gap

Most of us think we are really of little or no value in the grand scheme of things, and we often minimize our worth. Never mind that other people marginalize us, we regularly do it to ourselves. The original meaning of “to marginalize” was this: “to write notes in the margin of.” Today that definition is outdated, but it still gives us a modern visual of the term. Marginalization, as we currently define it now, is relegating someone as unimportant or to an unimportant status like they are barely recognizable and almost invisible as to be insignificant. God did not create us, and He most certainly did not call us out of this world to be without value in His church. We will answer the important question, “Can one man or woman really make a difference in the world?”

I sought a man to stand in the gap

In ancient times the best means of security for a city or a nation was a wall to keep the enemy out. Any gap in the wall was like an open door for enemy intruders to come in and kill and maim. Ezekiel is inspired to paint us a word picture in Ezekiel 22:30 where God says, *“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.”*

This is an analogy. Ezekiel 22 describes the sins and abuses of Israel. As their punishment God was going to allow them to go into captivity and they would be scattered among the nations. God was looking for just one person who would, in righteousness, intercede on behalf of Israel so God could forgo His judgement, but He found none. God searched for such a defender, but He could find no one. Not that there was not a righteous man in the city, Jeremiah, Baruch, and others were still there. But Jeremiah had been forbidden to pray for the people (Jeremiah 5:1; 11:14), as being doomed to wrath. It seems if someone had been willing to “stand in the gap,” the destruction of Jerusalem could have been avoided. Since no one was able or willing to defend the breach and rebuild the wall, judgment fell upon them.

Can one man really make a difference?

It is interesting that a similar incident occurred with ancient Israel in the wilderness when they sinned concerning the golden calf: *“Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.”* (Psalm 106:23) By standing in the gap, he stepped between God and His people and pleaded for mercy on their behalf, and the Almighty spared them. Moses had been chosen specially for that very purpose, and He was just one man.

What about Jesus Christ? I suppose there is no one in the civilized world on earth who has not heard about Jesus, Son of the carpenter and Mary, the ultimate sacrifice, Who stood in the gap for mankind.

How about Elijah? Israel turned to the worship of Baal. Baal was the Canaanite storm god and Baal worship became attractive to a nation that depended on rain for survival. As the King goes, so goes the kingdom. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel led the people away from God into the sin of idolatry; God sent His faithful prophet Elijah to stand in the gap between God and the people of Israel, calling on God’s miraculous power to help them find their way back to Him. Jezebel had 850 "prophets" of Baal who enjoyed her support and protection. These were now gathered at Mount Carmel, together with the great masses of the northern Kingdom of Israel. Elijah became God’s instrument at Mount Carmel to confront the prophets of Baal, standing in the gap between good and evil, calling upon His people to repentance. Israel had to be awakened to their complacency: *“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter*

between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word.” (I Kings 18:21)

Elijah demonstrated that the prophets of Baal were false, and Baal was a fake god. God both started the drought by the word of Elijah, stopping rain in Samaria for three and a half years, and then lifted it, restoring rain. This solidified the faith of the people in the true God (I Kings 17:1; I Kings 18:1-3; James 5:16).

John the Baptist followed in the footsteps of Elijah. He set the stage for the arrival of the prophesied Messiah (Malachi 3:1). John preached repentance and purification through baptism, calling upon people to turn their hearts to God. John humbly stood in the gap for Judah by preparing the way for the Messiah, Jesus. His role was to prepare the people to receive the Messiah and prepare their minds for the coming kingdom of God. John’s practice of immersion in the Jordan River symbolized cleansing by repentance and recommitting to God.

Mark 1:2-7 states: *As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’ ” John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*

John was imprisoned and subsequently beheaded; with outspoken boldness, he told Herod Antipas his marriage to Herodias was unlawful. He married his brother’s wife, prohibited by the Torah. Jesus said of John in Matthew 11:11: *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist...”*

Are you willing to stand in the gap?

The lyrics of the song “The Impossible Dream” from the Broadway play, “The Man of La Mancha,” speaks of the kind of steel-like determination we must have to step up when no one else will. The inspiring words of the song states we must be, “willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause, and I know if I'll only be true to this glorious quest, that my heart will lie peaceful and calm, when I'm laid to rest and the world will be better for this, that one man, strong and covered with scars still strove with his last ounce of courage.”

God places high value to those who raise the bar of sacrifice in their lives to sacrifice for the benefit of others. Standing in the gap for others is a powerful demonstration of living our faith. It is seeking to help inspire others by example to turn to God. Often it is standing up and defending the overlooked and the weak. The apostle James wrote the early church at large: *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”* (James 1:27). Psalms 82:3 says further, *“Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy.”*

King Solomon wisely instructed in Proverbs 31:8-9: *“Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”*

The apostle Paul admonishes us, *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”* (Phillippians 2:3-4).

In a world where most look away from the needs of others, we are instructed to look out for the interests of others, and where the opportunity arises, to reach out a helping hand. We care about the things of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and His desire to reach this desperate world with the knowledge of the truth and His coming kingdom. He has called each of us to stand in the gap individually and collectively to make a great difference in the church and the world!