

# **Am I A Failure If No One Pays Attention To My Ministry Efforts?**

**By Rev. D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.**

This is a serious concern among ministers, lay leaders and individual Christians. “No one pays attention to me, so why am I going to all this trouble witnessing to them and trying to teach them?” To address it, we will look at an example of faith set forth by Jacob, described in the book of Hebrews.

**Heb 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.**

**Heb 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.**

If you understood the life of Jacob and the things that happened to him, the places he had been, and where he was when this particular thing was taking place you would know that Jacob had had a stormy life. Much of it was his own fault, it was true. The name *Jacob* means *a supplanter* or *one who takes another's place by treachery*. As we have just noted, this is certainly what Jacob did, the divine plan of God notwithstanding, in the case of his brother Esau whose blessing Jacob stole by treachery. Prior to that, he had taken advantage of a hungry and frightened young man and bought his birthright for a bowl of porridge. Jacob left his home when Esau was after him to kill him.

## ***What Goes Around, Comes Around***

Jacob got involved with his father-in-law, Laban, who was a more treacherous man than he was. Jacob was tricked into marrying a girl he did not want and had to live with her seven years till he finally got the girl that he

did want. Then, when he decided to go back to the land of his fathers, his own father-in-law pursued him and tried to kill him. When he wrestled with the Lord, he was made a cripple.

### ***Chips Off The Block***

Jacob's sons were very treacherous men. They sold their youngest brother, Joseph, into slavery. They dipped his coat in the blood of an animal and told their father he had been killed by a lion.

### ***My Days are Evil and Few***

So there was Jacob down in Egypt, a slave in a pagan country. He was so old he could hardly see and he was now dying. He was so weak he could not sit up without a cane on which to lean. He sat on the edge of his bed and Joseph brought his two sons before him and, in one of the great passages of the Bible that foretells the new covenant, Jacob blessed them. The Bible says that Jacob was old and his eyes were dim with age. He pulled the two boys very close so he could see which was which. He guided his hands wittingly, the Bible says, putting his hand on the head of the youngest, Ephraim, and he gave him the blessing. Joseph was very upset and contended with his father. He tried to remove Jacob's hand from the head of Ephraim and put it on the head of Manasseh. "Father, you're making a mistake," Joseph cried. "Manasseh is the oldest. He is my firstborn and the one you should bless."

"I know it my son," Jacob said. "I know which is which. Manasseh will be a great nation, but Ephraim shall be greater and shall be the father of many nations." And he set Ephraim above Manasseh that day.

### ***How Important is the Ministry God Gives Us?***

This is a very important Biblical prophecy (which we will not delve into just now because it is diversionary to the point). It is also a great testimony of faith, and we will talk about that. Jacob was an old, discouraged man, at the end of a long, weary, trying and disappointing life. He who should have been the patriarch of a great nation was a slave down in Egypt, betrayed by his own sons. He was dying and hardly had the strength to sit up on the edge of his bed. What made Jacob think that what he had to say was important? Here is

the lesson, and I hope you listen to it: It teaches us faith in the ministry that God has given us.

How many times have I seen it with those in the formal and the lay ministry who started out and thought something big and important was going to happen. They went forth and really pursued their work with a vengeance and a zeal, only to find out by experience that nobody much cared. They were talking more to themselves than they were to anyone else. Largely ignored, left on the back roads of life, treated with indifference and contempt, all of their hopes and ambitions dashed and now weary and tired, they give up and quit. Their attitude becomes, "Well, what difference does it make? Nobody pays any attention to me anyhow. No one takes me seriously. No one wants to hear it." In the pettiness of their spirit they sit down and feel sorry for themselves. They abandon the ministry that God has given them, deeming themselves to be a failure, and let the whole thing slide.

Jacob could have done that, but he did not. For all of his shortcomings and all of the short hands that life had dealt him, Jacob had this understanding: God has given me a ministry. It is important because God gave it to me. God does not send anyone out on assignments that are not important. I am going to see this through to the end if it takes the last ounce of strength I'm got.

### ***The Least Shall be the Greatest***

Was it important for Jacob to bless the sons of Joseph and to set Ephraim above Manasseh. This event provided the basis for one of the greatest, if not the greatest, Biblical prophecies for the New Testament. Like most prophecies having to do with the mystery of Christ, it is misunderstood today. Even so, it is one of the glaring examples from Genesis that show the New Covenant of Promise was there all along and was superior in nature to the Old Covenant it would one day supersede. There it was in the life of Jacob, his son Joseph, and his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh for all to see.

This is a sterling witness of a man who had faith in the ministry that God gave him when there was no reason to believe that what he was about to do

was important. What possible difference could it make; the blessing of an old, failed, dying, blind man; but Jacob believed in it, and in so doing he carried out a most important assignment of God. But is it really important to anyone today? I can tell you very candidly, with God as my witness, it has been very instrumental in my own studies of the Bible in helping me understand the continuity of the plan of God from the beginning. This one occasion where Jacob sat up, leaning on his cane, hardly able to see, and said in effect, "God has asked me to bless my grandsons and give this blessing and I've got to do it." That tenacity, and that belief in the importance of what God gave him to do when there was no reason, humanly speaking, to believe it, showed faith in God, and belief in the reward for faithful service. This has been a great example to me personally through the years. There are times in the life of every person who serves God when they wonder: What's the use? What's the purpose? What am I really accomplishing? Of course, there are all this host of Job's comforters, these big dealers, psychologists and movers and shakers in the Christian world who chide you and say, "What do you think you're doing with your little insignificant life and your little insignificant ministry?" I have had them among old friends, family and others in the ministry. The temptation is to listen to them and say, "That's right, what do I think I'm doing." But then I see the faith of men like Jacob, Jeremiah and Job who stood their ground and said, "It's right and it's important because God gave it to me and asked me to do it. It is God, not me, Who decides what is important and what is not. Mine is to have confidence in Him and to be faithful unto death." I have learned something that I fear many who would be in the ministry never learn. The one thing that is important in this life is to carry out, and carry out well, the work that God has given us. It does not matter what that work is. That is God's prerogative. In the day of judgment, the magnitude and human evaluation of the work I have done will be of no consequence whatsoever. The one question of importance will be whether or not I had confidence in God and felt the importance of being faithful to the ministry He gave me.

***Every Man Shall Bear His Own Burden***

It is not important to compete with others. The Bible says that comparing ourselves one to another is not wise. Jesus said that the man who was given one talent and produced one yielded an hundred fold. The man who was given two and produced two yielded an hundred fold. The man who was given five and produced four did not yield an hundred fold. Competition is not important. Comparing ourselves one to another is a carnal and a humanistic thing to do. How faithfully are you doing your work? Do not bother to tell me you do not have a work. You have a work and you know what it is. You have a ministry. You have got someone to witness to, someone to pray for, someone to assist financially — God has given you something to do. What is your heart about that thing? How do you feel about it? How important is it to you? That is a direct reflection upon God and His character as you see it. Has God dealt you a short hand? Did God leave you out? Has God given everyone else something important to do, but not you? If you feel that way about your life and your ministry, then you do not have the faith that it takes to please God. If you are struggling with this, think long and carefully on this example of the faith of the ancients — the faith of Jacob as he blessed his two grandsons.

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