

December 1999 The Christmas Challenge

by Aaron Greenway

Growing up can be tough. Many have felt abandoned, misunderstood and rejected throughout life. In their ministries they have been undermined and quickly brushed aside because of their youth or some kind of handicap.

Many have felt this way growing up. In fact, when going back to your home town, people still don't understand you. They still see you as a child and do not believe for one second (regardless of what they say) that you could do anything significant for Christ. This really hurts. While family and hometown friends are often wonderful, I recommend that anyone who is struggling with the "prophet = no honor" syndrome needs to take some time away.

Jesus knew exactly what it was like to be belittled. After all, he was just the carpenter's son. And had Jesus stayed in Nazareth with his ministry, He would never have done anything of significance. He would have shortchanged His own mission on account of the unbelief of His family and friends.

Although, it is not true in every case, we can become so beat down by the doubts of the people in our hometowns, in our families and in our churches. Many think, "Can anyone possibly believe that you could do anything? I mean, come on, you're only 19 years old" Or, "You're 79 years old. You're too old!" We make these kinds of judgment calls all the time. And people in the Church today relegate our youth or our elderly or the handicapped to the back seat of ministry because they do not believe they can do anything for Jesus.

During this season, we reflect on the whole principle that some of the greatest things can happen in the most insignificant ways. God uses many of the most "low key" circumstances to produce His greatest work; and the lowliest people to produce some of the highest efforts. Why is this? So, man cannot boast! So human beings cannot rob any glory away from God. This is why we

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must be careful in our attitudes not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought or to judge someone's effectiveness for Christ based on their visible signs of stamina and ability. Although abilities are important, God will use the least to produce the most, just to prove that it was He that did it.

Our Savior was born in a feeding trough (Luke 2:7) to a poor, young woman named Mary (Matthew 1:18-25). He was a carpenter's step son. But when He was born, there were a few "smart ones" who were spiritually awake enough to see what God was doing in a small corner of the world that would inevitably redeem millions of people all over the world. Shepherds adored Him (Luke 2:8-20). Wise men worshiped Him (Matthew 2:1-2). And Simeon and Anna (the prophetess) waited their whole lives just for the moment when the Messiah would come (Luke 2:25-38). And when He did, they were there to witness it.

With all the "pomp and circumstance" of Christmas that is in our society and that has penetrated our churches, there is no doubt in my mind that we would miss the Christ child today because we are still looking for the show. We are looking for the glamor and glitz. And as long as we continue to do that, we will miss what God wants to do. And He will use the people and the circumstances that fall just below the high vision of the "important people."

Paul says in I Corinthians 1:26-29, 31,

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence....He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

This ought to be a comfort to those of us who have taken it on the chin, who have been scoffed at or shoved aside as unimportant and expendable. It also ought to help us guard against measuring the ministries of others based on their popularity, their influence, or their apparent abilities. God

has a place in His Kingdom and in His army for those who will give up their own self-promotion and their own significance for the sake of His eternal glory. Jesus was the first to sign up! Who will be next?