

When Good Men Do Nothing

For over a thousand years good men did nothing. Maybe that is not quite saying it right. For over a thousand years good men could do no good publicly and prosper with the good. Their good prospered in non-public ways, in ways forgotten to history. Some men in all ages have found ways to do good, but their good has been lost to public sight. Only the Heavenly records will tell the private stories.

For you see, when good men do good, most people hate them for it. Think about Jesus Christ Himself. He could exercise Himself in public ministry for only 3 ½ years until the Jews had Him removed. Then He went down in Jewish history as a Pretender. The Romans who actually did the killing forgot Him. Josephus and a few others remembered snatches of Him, Josephus himself wondering if the man Jesus should even be called a man. Otherwise, history went silent.

Except for the people who did good. The good men we know as the Disciples became even better men after the Spirit came upon them. And so did quite a few others. We know the entire group as Believers, followers of the Way. These men continued to do good in every place they found themselves. And eventually they wrote the original story of the Good Man we know as Jesus Christ. We read four of those stories today in the four Gospels.

More good men joined the Way and we now have the history of the Early Church in the Book of Acts and beyond.

Unfortunately, the Way became too easy, so easy that entire groups of people joined *en masse*, bringing their badness with them. The Goodness and Badness were married to become the State Church for over one thousand years. That is the official story, the story we read. What we do not read (because it has been lost to written record) are the forgotten stories of men and women who did good wherever and whenever they could in common everyday ways. Who knows how many people did this? Multitudes most likely, numbers we will never know this side of Eternity.

Some names have been publicly remembered for good. People such as Benedict of Nursia, Catherine of Sienna, St. Francis of Assisi, and Peter Waldo, to name a few. We remember the

public men such as John Wycliffe and John Hus. The latter two names took great risks with their good, Hus eventually paying for his risk with his life. The numerous Waldensians generously paid for their risks as well. The great fact to remember however was the light they kept alive, the candles they kept burning in the darkness. The lights were noticed; the lights encouraged many other lights to spring into existence.

And then, when Martin Luther came along, good men found a champion holding a large flaming torch. And he was not alone; men like Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin held their own flaming torches aloft. But alas the pressures of darkness dimmed those torches to shine only into a continuation of the State Church darkness. And then other good men were really put to the test. Would they as good men do what they needed to do with their calling?

Thus we have the story of good men doing what good men always do, insisting on Good regardless of the cost, and the Anabaptist movement was born. The good these men insisted upon was attacked by both kinds of state churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant.

The story of how that good survived in a number of separate geographical locations is quite interesting to read. Imagine having a meeting of more than fifty leaders who gave each other the assignments to fan out through the darkness with their tiny lights, knowing the likely results of doing so! Imagine the character, courage, and wisdom of Michael Sattler! Such courage of these men, actually doing good, multiplied their tiny flames into a multitude of other tiny flames each lighting separate pockets of darkness in the locales where they lived and worked. Think of Pilgram Marpeck, inspired by the good which he personally witnessed, providing written encouragement while suffering the ravages of the storming darkness around himself. Think of Jacob Hutter who cared, cared so much that his good was soon squashed.

The stories of good men doing something five hundred years ago is quite inspiring and encouraging. The stories of good men doing something while being hidden in the darkness of the previous thousand years stirs courage in our own hearts today. We too, live in deepening darkness. We too, have a tiny light. We too, are presented with an opportunity to do something with the light that we have.

We need not seek fame and large-scale good which will be written in tomorrow's history books. Every one of us lives amid the darkness of our own neighborhoods. Some of us live geographically close to pockets of deep, deep darkness. What happens when good men do nothing? The darkness simply deepens. What happens when good men carry a tiny candle

flame into the darkness? A little bit of light penetrates that darkness. That tiny bit of light is HOPE to those chained to the darkness.

We must boldly walk into the darkness where we live, carrying aloft our tiny flame. This is the way good men do something. They do not set out to do great things. They are simply obedient to the call at their doorstep and God takes it from there. What will God do with tiny candle flames today? I do not know. I do know that the tiny candle flames penetrating the darkness five hundred years ago did break the powers of darkness to the point that we today enjoy freedoms guaranteed by law. The good men who did something five hundred years ago never lived to see the result of their good, the light of complete separation of church and state. What might God do yet with the tiny flames of men and women who insist upon proactively doing good in our world today? Plenty of darkness exists.