

The True Measure of a Man

Let's steal a watermelon! But let's make sure we get a good one! We can do this by measuring it; we can thump it to test for ripeness; we can record it's length; it's circumference. We can even place it on a pair of scales and record it's weight. But to find the true measure of the melon, we must slice it in two, separate the halves, scoop out and taste the red pulp inside. And then we can judge the merits of this particular melon relative to all other watermelons that we have ever known.

And when we measure a man we do many of the same things. A doctor thumps his chest to check him for his health. We measure his height; we place him on a pair of scales and record his weight. We test him for his interest, his aptitude, his motivation. BUT we can't slice a man in two and test the red pulp inside! What then is the True Measure of a Man?

What's Inside Counts

Very simply it's the length and the breadth and the depth of his character. Now unfortunately many people confuse character with personality. But personality is what we have on the outside and character is what we have inside. Personality is what we have when we're among others and character is what remains when the others have gone home.

When an architect designs an arch he pays particular attention to the Keystone: the stone in the center. Because it's the shape of the keystone that gives the strength, the stability and the beauty to the entire archway.

Each man is the architect of his own life. But the strength, the stability and the beauty of that life is dependent upon the form of his keystone: his character. Within the framework of human civilization it's the collective strength of all men's characters that provide the muscle under the flesh of human history.

For instance, consider this Nation's history and the men of character who have shaped it.

Men such as Benjamin Franklin, who believed in man's right to be free and independent and who risked his life for that belief. And Thomas Jefferson who devoted an entire lifetime to the belief that men have the right and responsibility to govern themselves.

Abraham Lincoln who knew that all men were created equal regardless of their color at birth. And who also knew that a nation one torn apart must pick up the

pieces of its spiritual soul and knit itself again into a sovereign whole. And Abraham Lincoln lost his life for that belief.

Yes, and even men such as John L. Lewis, who blundered and blustered and bluffed his way to a point where at one time he was probably the most hated man in all America. But John Lewis believed in principle; that principle being that his men, his miners, had the right to human dignity. That just because they worked in the bowels of the earth did not mean they were to be treated as secretion of society when they walked on the earth's crust. And John L. Lewis braved the contempt of a nation and won dignity for his miners.

And yet character is not always revealed in the dramatic or the dynamic. For instance the little boy that carried another on his shoulder and met Father Flannigan with this statement – “No, he ain't heavy, Father, he's my brother!” What strength of character lies behind that statement.

When Character is Lost

When a man has lost his character he's a pitiful creature. Very similar to the poor illiterate that stands in the middle of the road with a rope in his hands and can't determine if he's found a rope or lost a horse! He's a totally and hopelessly confused individual. One of the most brilliant generals in the American Revolutionary War, the man who meant the difference between early American defeat and eventually American victory, the man who led America to its first naval victory – that man lost his character. And what does the name Benedict Arnold mean to you?

We see then that a man's character is composed of three basic elements:

First – his principles, his ethics

Second – his belief in, his practice of those principles and ethics

Third – his willingness to serve his fellow man

A priceless Possession

A man knows when he has character because he sees it reflected in the eyes of his children. Ah, the eyes of a little boy tell a great deal more about his father's character. But most importantly a man sees his character through the pupil of his own conscience.

Josh Chaffins lay entombed fifteen hundred feet below the earth's surface, the result of a mine cave-in. As he lay dying he took a piece of scrap paper from his pocket and a stubby miner's pencil and wrote these, his last words, to his wife.

“I love you more than you’ll ever know. Take care of the kids and raise them to serve the Lord.” Josh Chaffins left very little of material value to his family but that family inherited a priceless possession: part of his character.

When we’re born, it’s a miracle and when we die, it’s a revelation! What happens in between is determined largely by a man’s character. Character, the red pulp inside a man. Character, the true measure of a man.