

Faithful Servants

Leviticus 19:32 “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.”

Recently, while waiting in the security line at an airport, I stood behind a quiet man. This man was well-built, but with a few years on him, thick but with a subtle strength. Though well under six feet in height, no doubt, his carriage informed all that there was something unusual about him. A curve or two of the line brought my eyes to a hulk of a youth, well over six feet tall, obviously military, probably either headed home for a brief visit or being deployed. At one point, the lines brought the two near each other, and a brief conversation of "what and where" ensued. The older man (by about 45 years) asked about some special training the other had just completed; the youth replied that he had passed, and the man congratulated him. The youth instantly replied, “I made it, but nothing like you guys would have done.” Unknown to me, the older man must have been a part of some special unit and was revered by the younger man, who was unafraid to give honor to whom honor was due.

I suddenly envied the camaraderie and felt I was intruding a little bit into something sacred held by only these two among the crowd in the security line. Though they shared a few warm and friendly words, the awe directed to the elder man was clear. The line moved, the two were parted, and I felt as if I were standing on holy ground. Someone very special stood before me, and I held a great respect for the young hulk behind me for his unashamed reverence of the elder man.

We like the grit and toughness of our military. All of us admire the scars or the battle wounds of veteran military folks. He will not push his way up front, but he will stand in the back and say little, for he has seen the frailty of men, his own and that of others. He has seen enough that he desires no accolades, avoids the platform, and certainly holds quietly inside the wisdom of decades.

We all smile at the good-looking youth in his dress uniform, but we desire to be shown the old soldier who served 20-30 years and endured many deployments. We feel an awe, an almost spiritual reverence, and rightly so. Even though you know the older soldier

has gained a few more pounds, he has also gained more battle wisdom, grit, and deadly experience than the good-looking, fresh youth could imagine; the wise youth knows this to be true.

America knows the veteran to be rich in experience and wary in conflict. The fearless youth might, in passion, run into the place where death awaits, unaware of the hidden danger. So our wise leaders use the older soldier to temper and guide the younger soldier. The aged soldier sees things the young man has not learned to identify. Some dangers cannot be seen; an instinct or sixth sense guides the seasoned vet who directs the youthful soldier to survive in dangerous situations.

To some extent, we feel the same way toward coaches. A coach may not be as athletic, yet he knows, sees, understands, and anticipates in order to guide the best of athletes to success.

Thanks to books, the internet, and video, I have the same awe toward the grizzled preachers, mostly discharged and gone on to their rewards. Having a heart scarred by decades of battle and having buried many a fallen friend, he sees what others cannot see. He can sense and is aware of the wiles of the wicked one that the passionate youth might miss.

The lean frame is long gone; the flash of the new uniform is missing. The smooth skin, the bright smile, and casual air are all so different from the battle-scarred prophet. He seems to walk with a little skepticism, guarded and wary. Having walked through deadly fires, wept over countless spiritual graves, worn toughened leather-like spiritual skin tanned in mighty conflicts, the veteran knows loss. The prophet knows the need for youthful blood and new soldiers on the battlefield, but he hopes the fair-skinned youth will not be too impressed by himself or those peers who boast of gifts and more current ideas.

Some people in America see the portly, old man with the "Vietnam Vet" or "WWII" hat and feel no respect or awe; but the wise, young soldier sees something rich and deep hidden beneath the wrinkles and gray hair.

Even in the difficult situation of Job and his friends, the younger Elihu understood that the prudent action was to hold his peace and let the elder men speak.

Job 32:4 “Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he.”

vs. 6 “And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion.”

Wise, young men are hesitant to divulge their thoughts, knowing they sit among wiser and more experienced men.

With unimpressed air, we use the colloquialism, "Been there; done that," but these seasoned soldiers of the cross “have and did;” impressed we should wisely be. The Elijah's and Micaiah's of our world, who faithfully wielded the Sword, have walked differently, looked differently, and stood almost alone among men. Each man is a warrior, prophet, and man of God. No one has ever worshiped any of them, and the idiots who blast their “man-worship” rhetoric are only revealing their immaturity and jealousy for the richness of the prophet's life and the reverence wise, younger men feel for them.

You will find no battle scars on the guy who fits into the world. You will not find any grizzled, old veterans of the contemporary church; for they have comfortably retired into their nice homes while they casually speak at their occasional conferences or cruises. Or they have found more fertile fields in secular business through writing or motivational speaking. Serving the church and weeping with the hurting hearts does not fit their successful lifestyle.

The prophets warned of the day when the ancient would not be revered.

Isaiah 3:5 “And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.”

The day when the elder is not honored is like the writing on the wall: trouble is on the way.

Lamentations 5:12 “Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.”

As for me, I will honor Jack Hyles (you knew it was coming, I did not want to disappoint you), John R. Rice, Lee Roberson, Oliver B. Green, Lester Roloff, Bob Jones, and their friends who fought the fight and stood true to the end.

I will, with awe and pride, "rise up before the hoary head" and honor their names.