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Pastor Matthew Woods

“Weighing Integrity”

Last week we talked about character. Character describes what a person is like. Integrity is what character is built upon.

Let’s get started with a recent example. By now we most of us have seen the pictures of the collapsed surf-side condo. A twin building was built beside it. You can find pictures of it all over the internet. The character of the building was ruined by a lack of integrity in its structure. The strongest theory I have heard is that the metal rebar that is normally within the concrete somehow got wet and swelled. This in turn cracked and broke the concrete around it weakening the structure. When the fractures had gone too far the structure could no longer support itself and it fell.

If we apply this illustration to integrity, we learn something valuable about ourselves. We learn that integrity is internal. One cannot notice what is going on inside until it exposes itself in one’s character like those concrete walls which were discovered too late. The metal rebar in the concrete eroded over time, constantly exposed to forces that little by little compromised the steel rebar. Until finally, it broke and the character of the building was lost. In the same way Christian character cannot stand if it is not structurally sound in the Word.

The integrity of the building was compromised and therefore, ruined the character of the building. On the other hand, its sister building next door has been reported to be structurally sound. The integrity of the structure remains intact therefore, the building remains strong. This is a good illustration of how integrity affects character.

Now consider our reading for this week from Exodus 1:15-20. ¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶ “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

²⁰ So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

The Egyptians were getting nervous about the fertile Hebrews whom they worried may rise up and overthrow the Egyptians. So, Pharaoh started looking for a way to cull the population by assigning the midwives to destroy the male newborns. However, these two midwives feared God more than Pharaoh. Despite the risks to themselves they decided to let the Hebrew boys live.

When they were called back to Pharaoh to answer for their actions Pharaoh asked, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?” Their answer is one of my all-time favorites: “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.” This my friends was a creative answer if there ever was one.

These woman however, did not compromise their faith in the Lord. The integrity of their faith remained intact. And therefore, their godly character shined so much that God rewarded them with children of their own. Without this integrity, Moses would not have survived.

There are many examples of integrity in scripture. The three men in the fiery furnace. David before Goliath. Paul before his accusers. No matter the pressures nothing in their faith cracked or weakened.

In regards to faith integrity is essential. Allow me to borrow an illustration. There is an old story about two neighbors, a baker and a farmer. The baker began to be suspicious of the farmer, wondering if he wasn't getting his money's worth when he paid for a pound of butter. He weighed the farmer's butter on several occasions, and the butter consistently weighed less than a full pound. Enraged, he had him arrested for fraud.

The judge asked the farmer at the trial, "I presume you have scales?"

"Yes, of course, Your Honor," the farmer replied.

"And I presume you use standard weights to measure your goods?" the judge asked.

"Yes, generally," said the farmer. "But I don't use them when serving the baker," replied the farmer.

"Then how do you hope to weigh accurately the butter you sell to your neighbor?" the judge asked.

"That's easy," the farmer said. "When the baker began to buy butter from me, I decided to buy my bread from him. I've been using his one-pound loaves to balance my scales when I portion out his butter.

If we weigh out integrity according to our own sense of things we will be found lacking. Integrity must be determined by a set of standards outside of ourselves or others. In the case of faith integrity is measured quite simply by how much the Word of God determines our actions. Do we fear God more than men? Integrity always exposes itself in character. If a man is honest his yes will be yes and his no will be no. Reputation will precede whomever is honest. And therefore, we are more likely to give him/her credibility. We are more likely to buy bread or butter from them. Integrity has a standard—God's Word above all else. Character is the outward expression of many things but it is always built upon integrity. Low integrity equals low character. High integrity equals godly character. The reason for this is simple. Integrity always speaks the truth, and always chooses truth of Jesus' Word above all else.

For those like the midwives this meant that it was more important to keep the first commandment first over Pharaoh. Same goes for the three men in fiery furnace, for Joseph when tempted by Potiphar's wife, and for the Apostle Paul, when pursued by his enemies. And, Lord willing, for us as well.

Lord willing our integrity is daily reinforced by the truth of God's Word, and the power of the Gospel above all else. And by the grace of God the content of your character is so godly that it is unmistakable that you believe in Jesus. It is on the scales of God's Word that integrity is truly weighed. Thankfully, no where is this more true than in Jesus who remained steadfast to the Father's will to be sacrificed on the cross for our sins. And when all other things break down or erode, He will still be there for us.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give His peace in Jesus. Amen.

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John 3:30

