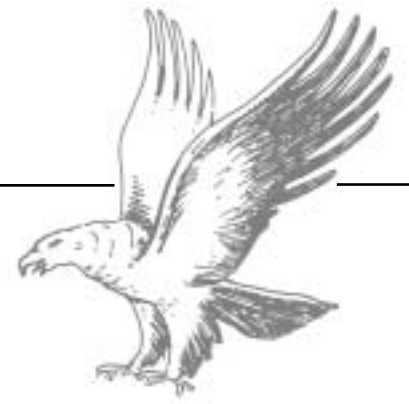


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



September 19, 2010

Half-Hearted Obedience

Obedience that comes and goes with the tide reveals a heart that is not yet determined to put God first. Eventually, it becomes disobedience.

“Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-one years in Jerusalem . . . And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart” (2 Chron. 25:1-2).

In the list of the Judean Kings, Amaziah is one of the few of whom the record states, “he did what was right in the sight of the Lord.” Considering some of the scoundrels on that list, this is a compliment.

However, the compliment comes with a qualifier: “but not with a loyal heart.” Other translations render the phrase, “but not with a *whole* heart.” In other words, Amaziah went through the motions of serving God, but his heart really wasn’t in it. His obedience was half-hearted at best.

This ambivalent loyalty can be seen in Amaziah’s campaign against the Edomites (v. 5-16). Prior to battle, Amaziah augmented his army with mercenaries from Israel. A prophet met Amaziah on his way to the battle and told the king to dismiss the mercenaries, for God was able to deliver a victory

without them. To his credit, Amaziah followed the prophet’s counsel and sent the mercenaries away. This was an act of faith; it took a lot of courage to reduce his forces by one-quarter simply because God said so.

Just as God promised, Amaziah and Judah won the battle decisively. Yet when Amaziah returned to Jerusalem, he set up the captured idols of the Edomite gods and began worshipping them. The warped logic of this move baffled God: “Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?” (v. 16). Clearly, the faith that led Amaziah to dismiss the mercenaries did not extend to his conduct in the flush of victory. While the outcome was in doubt, he trusted God and did what was right; but once the outcome was determined in his favor, he forgot God and did something utterly stupid.

Amaziah’s mercurial service is a fitting illustration of the kind of obedience that many people offer God today. They believe in God and want to do the right thing—especially when they’re in a jam.

But once they hit a stroke of good fortune and are exposed to a variety of worldly enticements, their loyalty melts like butter on a hot day and God is no longer all that important to them.

Sooner or later, the person who serves God with a divided heart will find a reason to cut corners and sell out God. He may obey God for awhile—when conditions are just right and it’s not too much trouble. But let conditions change, and his obedience will evaporate. His heart was never in the enterprise to begin with.

At the end of his life, Amaziah “turned away from following the Lord” and was assassinated by conspirators tired of his flaky rule (v. 27). Whatever he did right in his earlier years was overshadowed by a complete breakdown of his faith at the end. Half-hearted obedience never has a happy outcome.

Obedience can be faked; a loyal heart cannot. Our challenge is not merely to obey God, but to develop a deep-seated love for God that makes obedience meaningful. *That* is the faith that saves.

– David King