

## 4. Loyal hearts to God

October 2, 2014

A dictionary defines the word 'loyal' as following:

"faithful to one's oath, commitments, or obligations to person, institution, entity, or nation." It seems that less and less people are loyal to the cause they believe in, and more and more people are self-centered and watch out for No. 1 – themselves. This runs in a wide gamma among unbelievers as well as Christians.

In the end result, we see many broken marriages, families, contracts, and many more. It is one thing to be disloyal to a person, cause or an institution, but it is a completely different story if a follower of Christ becomes disloyal to one's Savior. That would be a betrayal. Judas was not the only one who deserted the Lord.

Some of you may have not heard of a man named "Charles Templeton". In 1936, Templeton converted to Christianity and became an evangelist. In 1946, the National Association of Evangelicals listed Templeton as the "best used of God" superseding even Billy Graham. But in 1957, after a long struggle with doubt, Templeton declared himself an agnostic. His public pronouncement of his loss of faith caused a backlash from the evangelical community.

Templeton's book "Farewell to God" was a desperate attempt by an unbeliever to deny the Bible to justify his own unbelief. Templeton stumbled through the first part of his life believing his beliefs and doubting his doubts and ended up the last part of his life doubting his beliefs and believing his doubts. And died an apostate and now he knows the truth of the Bible without any doubt. But it is too late for him to change his mind and his eternal destination. So sad.

Tonight we are going to meet two kings of Judah – Abijah and Asa. They all started well, but Asa really made serious mess at the end of his life, just about as bad as Charles Templeton. I believe that the Lord is going to teach us how to keep a loyal heart to Jesus in our lives to the end of our lives.

### A. FIGHTING AGAINST GOD

*2 Chronicles 13:12-18 Now look, God Himself is with us as our head, and His priests with sounding trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O children of Israel, do not fight against the Lord God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper!" 13 But Jeroboam caused an ambush to go around behind them; so they were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. 14 And when Judah looked around, to their surprise the battle line was at both front and rear; and they cried out to the Lord, and the priests sounded the trumpets. 15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, it happened that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16 And the children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand. 17 Then Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter; so five hundred thousand choice men of Israel fell slain. 18 Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time; and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers.*

This was a dishonorable tactic because Jeroboam ambushed while they were negotiating before the battle. King Jeroboam of Israel, the Northern Kingdom and the majority of world population would rather fight against God than simply submit to Him.

Let's face it and admit it. The believers of Jesus Christ are completely surrounded by the enemies of God. Though they may shut us in on all sides, but no earthly power can ever shut off God from above us. The way upwards is always kept clear; the Ladder which links the believers of God and heaven can never be blocked, except by our own transgression and sin.

Please note this: If we are trying to justify, or rationalize, or even ignore what the Lord tells us in the Word of God because it gets in the way of our carnal life, it only means that we are fighting against the Lord. And we cannot possibly think that we are going to win over God and He gives into whatever we want. Fighting against the Lord means making Him our enemy. Guess who is going to win.

## **B. GOOD AND RIGHT IN THE EYES OF THE LORD**

*2 Chronicles 14:2-7 Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, 3 for he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images. 4 He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment. 5 He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him. 6 And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest; he had no war in those years, because the Lord had given him rest. 7 Therefore he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities and make walls around them, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us, because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered.*

I love to see this kind of verses like v2. Asa, a great -grandson of Solomon took the throne Judah at the end of Jeroboam's reign in Israel, after his father Abijah's brief reign. As is related in 1 Kings 15:11, Asa was more like his ancestor David in his character as a king than he was like his own father.

How did Asa become 'good and right in the eyes of the Lord'? What can we learn from him? The Scripture shows to us:

- v3 *for he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images.*

He didn't expect others to do it first, rather he started cleansing in his own house, the palace. He removed any idols and idol-related things from the palace. How can we tell others to follow the Lord if we have ungodly things in our hearts?

*2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

- v4 *He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment.*

He, then, sought after the Lord through His Law and followed the commandment of the Lord and commanded others to follow God.

*Psalms 1:2 His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

One caution, if I may, the Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge to boast but to change our lives from inside out.

- v5 *He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah*

Since he cleansed his own house, now he earned the right to tell others to cleanse their homes and communities.

Interestingly, 1 Kings 15:14 says of the reign of Asa, but the high places were not removed. Since 2 Chronicles 14:3 connects these high places with altars of the foreign gods. Therefore Asa removed the high places that were dedicated to idols, but not the ones that were dedicated to the Lord.

It is no wonder that the Lord was delighted by Asa's heart and his work for God and gave him rest all around.

Then, the Lord gave Asa a test:

*2 Chronicles 14:9-12 Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah. 10 So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11 And Asa cried out to the Lord his God, and said, "Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!" 12 So the Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.*

Asa passed the Lord's test with flying colors. When he faced a million man army with their three hundred chariots, he simply turned to the Lord and prayed to Him. In his prayer Asa correctly understood that God's power was not enhanced or limited by man's apparent strength or weakness. He recognized that this battle belonged to the Lord and called upon God to defend His honor. And the Lord took care of Asa's enemy.

We, the believers of Jesus have double protections from the Lord Jesus and God the Father, much better than what Asa had:

*John 10:28-29 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*

Speaking of prayer, let's talk about our prayer. If someone comes to us and ask us to pray for his headache, we might pray in a casual and nonchalant manner. But if someone else comes to us and tells us that she has a brain tumor, our praying attitude will be changed immediately. Some of us might even come up with King James Version lingo to emphasize our prayer request to the Lord. If someone with an amputated arm comes along and asks us to pray that the Lord grows a new arm on him, we might not even pray for that.

What does make us think that God can do one thing, but cannot do another? It is not the matter of whether the Lord can do it or not, but whether it is in His will or not. Listen, difficulty must always be measured by the capacity of the one who is doing the work. Nothing is too difficult for our Lord.

### **C. THE ORACLE OF BLESSING AND WARNING**

*2 Chronicles 15:1-7 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. 2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you*

seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. 3 For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; 4 but when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. 5 And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. 6 So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. 7 But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

This was one of those lesser-known prophets in the early years of the kingdom of Judah. King Asa and the Kingdom of Judah had just enjoyed a significant victory over a mighty army. It would be easy to think that they had a permanent claim to God's favor and blessing. Speaking through the prophet Azariah, God wanted Asa to know the importance of abiding in the Lord.

This is not only the OT principle, but the NT as well.

*John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

The blessing of God's promise for those who seek Him comes with a warning from the Lord which we should take very seriously.

#### **D. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING, ASA?**

*2 Chronicles 15:18 He also brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated and that he himself had dedicated: silver and gold and utensils. 19 And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa. 2 Chronicles 16:1-3 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 2 Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, 3 "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. Here, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me."*

*2 Chronicles 16:7-10 And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. 8 Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars." 10 Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time.*

Before when Asa and Judah were small and weak, the king relied on the Lord. Now that he became a big shot with the help of the Lord, he thought, "I can take it from here, Lord." So, he made a treaty with Syria. Compromise blinds us to who our true enemies are and it leads us into alliances with those whom God would rather give us victory over.

Though Asa had a victory against Israel, it was the victory that brought shame on himself. When he was warned by prophet Hanani, he should have repented before

the Lord. Instead of repenting, he chose to punish the messenger. In reality, he wanted to punish the Lord, but since he couldn't get the Lord, he settled for the less – the messenger. Within 5 years, Asa was dying in pain, yet he still didn't repent.

Pride is the only known disease that makes everybody sick except the person who has it. Unless cured, pride is a sickness unto death.

2 Chronicles 16:9 is a very famous verse and many people have this verse in a plaque or picture frame on their walls. Our God is more than willing to help us and protect us. One thing He asks from us is being loyal to Him. The issue is not the strength of God or His willingness to use that strength on behalf of His people, rather it is a matter of our loyal heart to follow Him.

### **E. APPLICATIONS**

1) If we are trying to justify, or rationalize, or even ignore what the Lord tells us in the Word of God because it gets in the way of our carnal life, it only means that we are fighting against the Lord. And we cannot possibly think that we are going to get our way and the Lord would wink at our sins. Fighting against the Lord means making Him our enemy. Guess who is going to win.

2) The blessing of God's promise for those who seek Him comes with a warning from the Lord which we should take very seriously.

3) One thing the Lord asks from us is being loyal to Him. The issue is not the strength of God or His willingness to use that strength on behalf of His people, rather it is a matter of our loyal heart to follow Him.