

6. Shallow faith or no faith

October 30, 2014

To be honest with you, I don't know which one is worse – "Shallow faith in God" or "No faith in God." Jesus talked about this in one of His parables:

Matthew 13:18-23 "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 19 When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. 20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

The people with shallow faith in God in v20-22 think that they are saved, but they choose to struggle in their walk with Christ because they still have one foot in the world. They are driven by their carnal nature rather than doing what the Lord tells them to do through the Word of God.

At least you don't have to wonder where atheists stand when it comes to faith in Christ. But the people with shallow faith have a false sense of security for their eternal life in their minds and think that they are OK with God.

Growth and maturity are the normal and expected outgrowth of an initial decision to follow Jesus. But we find a big number of believers are content with their shallow faith in God and don't care to have a deep relationship with Him.

Shallow Christianity is marked by the five C's:

It is CASUAL, not committed.

It is based on CONVENIENCE, not on covenant.

It knows COMFORT, but not the cross.

It is COMPROMISED, not consecrated.

It produces CARNALITY, not Christ-likeness.

Tonight, we will encounter a couple of Hebrew royalties – wicked queen mother Athaliah and king Joash. Athaliah who was a daughter of Jezebel and Ahab lived and died up to her family reputation. King Joash was the one whom we are going to study more in depth so that we wouldn't be like him, ever.

A. ATHALIAH WITH NO FAITH

2 Chronicles 22:10-12 Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah. 11 But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered, and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah so that she did not kill him. 12 And he was hidden with them in the house of God for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

2 Chronicles 23:12-15 Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people in the temple of the Lord. 13 When she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance; and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets, also the singers with musical instruments, and those who led in praise. So Athaliah tore her clothes and said, "Treason! Treason!" 14 And Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were set over the army, and said to them, "Take her outside under guard, and slay with the sword whoever follows her." For the priest had said, "Do not kill her in the house of the Lord. 15 So they seized her; and she went by way of the entrance of the Horse Gate into the king's house, and they killed her there.

The queen mother Athaliah seized the throne and reigned six years after she killed all the rightful heirs, so she thought. As the founder of Baal worship in Judah, she had no love for the Davidic dynasty continued. Besides, being controlled by Satan, she was trying to eliminate any royal seed of David so that there wouldn't be the possibility of the promised Messiah from being born in David's family.

While Athaliah was hunting down the heirs to David's throne, the faithful remnant in Judah must have wondered where God was and what He was doing like many of us would wonder when personal or national crisis hits us. But God was on the throne then, He still is on the throne and ever will be. He has never lost control of anything. We are the ones who tend to lose the sight of our Almighty God due to the circumstances that we allow to stand between us and Him.

Athaliah could yell all she wanted, but the Lord was putting a descendant of David back to the throne through the godly man Jehoiada the priest. There are moments when Satan seems overshadowing the Lord, the Lord is allowing Satan to do what he does worst so that the Lord might be glorified and His name shines through the darkness of the demonic world.

B. JOASH WITH SHALLOW FAITH

2 Chronicles 24:1-3 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. 2 Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3 And Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.

V2 bothers me. Joash felt that he was obligated to do to the Lord what Jehoiada the priest said since he saved his life and raised him and put him on the throne. That's a borrowed and shallow faith. Joash didn't have his own relationship with God, nor did he seek after God with his own heart.

As the pastor and teacher of our church, I try my best to provide spiritual foods for our congregation and ways to have deeper relationship with the Lord. That's why we recite weekly verses, Bible index, and study the Bible in expository manner, of course, I pray for them daily. But if some of the people think that they can rely on my faith in God, they are daydreaming.

We cannot expect that we will grow mature in the Lord when we have shallow faith by the reasons of either borrowed faith or carnality. Many Christians actually think that they are mature in the Lord, but they are not.

But the Lord knows the depth of their spiritual conditions exactly, so as an extra curriculum He assigns trials and tests for them to know their own maturity. Some fall apart at the first wave of challenge and cower themselves in the corner; some give up in the middle of the fight because they get tired and weary; but some realize that the Lord is their only hope and strength and they run to Him to be rescued.

Here are a few things that we must notice regarding Christian spiritual maturity:

1) Time does not make us spiritually mature.

Time is certainly helpful when it comes to spiritual growth, but time alone is no guarantee that growth has taken place or will take place.

Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Wow, that's a smack between the eyes. Like these Hebrew people, many Christians tend to regress instead of progress.

2) Proximity does not make us spiritually mature.

Proximity refers to closeness, and this is a case in point for Joash hanging around Jehoiada the priest. Again, this can help if that person wants to learn, but it doesn't guarantee maturity.

Judas was close to Jesus; Ananias and Saphira were a part of the church; Felix the Roman governor in Acts 24 conversed often with Paul for 2 years; king Solomon grew up under the godly father king David, but what did he do at the end of his life?

While it's good to be in close relationship with believers and to be actively involved in a place of worship, we must have more than proximity; we must allow ourselves to be transformed by the Word and by the Spirit of God.

3) Appearance does not make us spiritually mature.

How many times have appearances been misleading? How many times have we seen someone who seemed to be very impressive and godly just because he or she has that 'Christian' appearance? Even the prophet Samuel nearly fell into the "appearance trap," when looking at Eliab, David's oldest brother as the next king. But God told him differently:

1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Being a Christian for 27 years and a pastor for 14 years made me realize that outward appearances don't necessarily constitute inward quality. I've met a few interesting people who were constantly dropping names and credentials to show that they were spiritually mature. Nope, I wasn't impressed and they turned out to be anything but mature Christians.

4) Experiencing trials do not make us spiritually mature.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

There are tremendous differences between experiencing trials and enduring trials. We can experience trials and be defeated and discouraged because we rely on our

own knowledge and capability, but when we endure which means “abide under” or “stand firm or persevere” trials with the power of God, then we will be mature in the Lord. Being bitter or better after trials is completely up to us.

5) Bible knowledge and spiritual gifts do not make us spiritually mature.

Apostle Paul was all over the believers of the Corinthian church in the Books of 1 and 2 Corinthians for this very reason. They were boasting about their Scripture knowledge and spiritual gifts like young children showing off their Christmas presents that they received. These people had nothing to do with those gifts because they were given to them – not by themselves, but by the Holy Spirit.

Biblical knowledge with humility is wonderful and it edifies others, because it comes from the love of God through the one who speaks, but when a person with knowledge tries to show off one’s knowledge, it turns into pride and it brings stench to our God.

1 Corinthians 8:1b Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

There is a great and insightful reason why the Lord spoke about love in 1 Corinthians 13 through apostle Paul while He was teaching us about the spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and 14 – LOVE. We must exercise our spiritual gifts to others in love, not in boasting. When we do that, we bring glory to the Father and extend His love to each other.

6) Being in ministry does not make us spiritually mature.

Serving the Lord is a wonderful thing, and it’s such a privilege when He calls and graces us to function in some type of ministerial capacity whether it is a pastoral position or janitorial. The Lord does not choose a person because he or she has that perfect capability to do the job, rather that person was obedient, but not necessarily capable. Where God guides, God provides.

1 Corinthians 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

C. THE UGLY TRUTH REVEALED

2 Chronicles 24:15-22 But Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died; he was one hundred and thirty years old when he died. 16 And they buried him in the City of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and His house. 17 Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them. 18 Therefore they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass. 19 Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the Lord; and they testified against them, but they would not listen. 20 Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, “ Thus says God: ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you.’” 21 So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. 22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son; and as he died, he said, “ The Lord look on it, and repay!”

This was not Jehoiada the priest's fault, rather Joash's shallow faith. Right after Jehoiada's death, the ugly truth of Joash's shallow faith was revealed. The faith that is not rooted and grounded in the Word of God and the deeper relationship with the Lord comes to surface one way or another.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) We cannot live on borrowed faith from someone. It must be our own and it must be deep in the Lord.

2) Truth in the heart and obedience from the heart will produce godly character.

God's Word and God's will must be internalized – received into the heart or we can never develop consistent Christian character. Until duty and discipline become delight, we are only reluctant servants who obey God because we have to, not because we want to.

Psalm 119:9-10 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!