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BLAH CHRISTIANITY

2 Chronicles 25

By

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Kings of Judah Lesson 7

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Charlie Brown and Lucy are walking along. Lucy says, "I can't think of that word ... There's one certain word that describes your personality, Charlie Brown, but I just can't think of what it is."

Charlie asks, "Blah?"

"THAT'S IT!" Lucy shouts, bowling Charlie over.

Charlie goes on to tell Lucy, "Look, you don't have to tell me I'm blah. I know I'm blah."

Lucy responds, "Well, then, there's still hope for you Charlie Brown. If you recognize this in yourself then that's the first step up from blahdom."

In the last frame Charlie asks quizzically, "Blahdom?"

But Charlie despairs, "How can anyone ever like someone as blah as I am?"

Lucy says, "Please don't despair Charlie Brown. Maybe there's a girl somewhere in the world just as blah as you ... Maybe you'll marry her ... And maybe you'll raise a whole flock of blah kids, and then maybe they'll go out and marry some other blah kids, and ..."

In the last frame Charlie runs away screaming, "AAUGH!"

Nobody wants to be blah. And there's nothing worse than blah believers--people who are Christian in name, but they're half-hearted about it. They don't have any convictions. There's nothing distinctive about their lives. They just sort of exist in Christian "blahdom."

You don't want to live there, do you? The life of King Amaziah tells you that you don't. He was a blah believer, straddling the fence, trying to get the best of both worlds. He wound up with a wasted life that accomplished little. His epitaph easily could have read, "Here lies King Amaziah, the Half-hearted. Ho-hum!" The

chronicler puts it, "And he did right in the sight of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart" (25:2). His life teaches us that

Half-hearted commitment results in inevitable ruin.

The parallel account (2 Kings 14:3) gives us a clue to his character: "And he did right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father; he did according to all that Joash his father had done." You remember his father Joash, the good boy who went bad. The central aspect of Joash's faith was that it wasn't his own. He rode on the coat tails of Jehoiada, but as soon as Jehoiada died, Joash went astray. He himself never walked in reality with God.

His son Amaziah learned to follow in his dad's steps. He did some good things and he did some bad things. But his life was not fully committed to the Lord. He never confronted the sin in his life. He never got serious about God.

A PORTRAIT OF HALF-HEARTED COMMITMENT

Let's get a thumbnail sketch of Amaziah, a half-hearted, blah believer. I see here seven strands of half-heartedness we need to avoid:

1. Half-heartedness means a little bit of obedience.

He executed his father's murderers, but at least he obeyed the Mosaic law, rather than the common custom of kings in that day, by not killing their sons (25:3, 4). In 25:10, we find him obeying the prophet, but only after questioning him. But later, when he decides to dabble in idolatry, he tells the prophet to shut up (25:16). He may have been angry because even though he obeyed the first prophet, he still suffered loss (25:13). After his victory over Edom, he was not following the Lord, but worldly convention, when he cruelly shoved his prisoners of war off a cliff (25:12). So Amaziah's life was marked by a little bit of obedience, but not complete obedience. Like Rehoboam, he suffered from the peril of partial obedience.

"Well," you say, "a little bit of obedience is better than none, isn't it?" That's debatable. If a man claims to be a Christian, a little bit of obedience can be a dangerous thing. Like the Pharisees, it's just enough to congratulate yourself that you're okay, but it's not the radical repentance that leads to eternal life (Matt. 5:29-30). It's

just enough to let others identify you as a Christian, but not enough to commend the faith to them. And so outsiders say, "If that guy is a Christian and lives like *that*, I don't want anything to do with Christianity!"

2. Half-heartedness means being ambitious for yourself, but not for the Lord.

Amaziah got right to work consolidating his kingdom and assembling an army. They marched off to battle against their enemies. But in all of this there is no mention of seeking the Lord and His glory. It was all for Amaziah.

A popular TV preacher encourages people to pursue their dream. That's fine if one condition (which I've never heard him mention) is met: If you got your dream from God. If your dream is in line with God's purpose and glory, then go for it! But if you're just out to pursue *your* dream, then you're just into American success. You're living for self, not for God, even if He gets a tip of the hat. God's glory and His purpose must be the aim of all our ambition.

3. Half-heartedness means following human wisdom, not God's wisdom.

Human wisdom often makes good sense and it works, but it leaves God out. A young king asks, "How do I build my kingdom?" Human wisdom answers, "Take a census, gather an army, hire mercenaries, take counsel for war, inflict punishment on your enemies, etc." The methods worked in his battle with Edom. But there was one major problem: Amaziah never sought the Lord's mind on any of these matters.

A lot of pastors in our day try to build the church like that. You learn the latest techniques, study your target audience, set goals, advertise, recruit workers, and manage everything properly. A lot of these church growth methods work well. But if faith in God and obedience to His Word isn't at the heart of what we're doing, then we're operating on human wisdom, and it's all wood, hay and stubble at best. If the Lord isn't in it, then even if it works we're just building a monument to ourselves.

4. Half-heartedness means concern for expedience over obedience.

(Note 25:6-9.) Amaziah's first concern was not, "Is it right or wrong?" "Is this what God wants?" Rather, his concern was, "What about the money I'll lose if I obey?" A hundred talents of silver was a pile--about 9,400 pounds! It is not wrong to consider the consequences, but it is wrong to consider the consequences *first*. The first matter to consider is the principle. In this case, Amaziah was unequally yoked with the idolatrous northern kingdom. The Lord was not with them, so how could he be with them? That was the principle. Only when Amaziah had considered that was he ready to ask, "What's it going to cost?"

That's how we ought to follow Jesus Christ. First, consider who He is, who He claimed to be. Is He in fact the promised Messiah and Savior? Does His life fulfill the Old Testament prophecies? Do His miracles authenticate His claims? Does His teaching come from God? Is He in fact raised from the dead? If so, then I must follow Him because He is the Truth.

Now, what's it going to cost me? Everything I've got! So be it. The question then is, Do I believe that the Lord can give me much more than I give up, if not in material goods, then in peace, joy, and righteousness? Of course, the "much more" is not always material. Quite often it costs you dearly to follow Christ above expedience. But if you put the Lord first, He always makes the gain outweigh the losses.

On one occasion Peter wondered about this. He said, "We have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" Jesus replied, "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:27, 29). In Mark's Gospel, the Lord is recorded as adding that not only will we receive in this age houses and family and farms, but also persecutions! And, in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:30). But it's a good trade to give up everything you have for that pearl of great price!

5. Half-heartedness means being susceptible to the evils you campaign against.

Amaziah, who knows about the living God, defeats these pagan idolaters in battle. But then he brings back their idols and bows down to them (25:14)! Incredible! Well, not really, when you keep in mind that Amaziah had a divided heart. Satan knows that half-hearted believers are only half against sin, and so he smiles and bides his time.

Every so often you hear of some preacher who campaigns against pornography who gets caught in an adult bookstore or with a prostitute. It's always sad, because the world mocks God on account of it. A man who isn't dealing with his own sin on the thought level had better not get into the ministry, because it's warfare against a subtle and powerful enemy. If Satan can't defeat you in open battle, he will lure you into his camp in other ways. He feels around the rim of your life for the cracks, and if he knows that you don't follow the Lord with a whole heart, he smiles as you campaign against immorality. It makes your fall look so much more spectacular!

6. Half-heartedness means rejecting the counsel of God in favor of the counsel of men.

This is stronger than the following of human wisdom rather than God's wisdom that we saw (under point 3). That was more just going along with the way the world does things; this is deliberately saying no to God's Word and choosing to go your own way. Notice the play on words (25:16, 17): -"counselor," "counsel" (v. 16), "counsel" (v. 17). Amaziah didn't want to hear the counsel of God, because it meant dealing with his sin. A half-hearted, blah-believer doesn't want to do that--it's too threatening. So instead he found counselors who told him what he wanted to hear, namely, to go to war against Joash, king of Israel. But this was his eventual undoing.

Proverbs 21:30 states, "There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord." When a man rejects the counsel of God in favor of the counsel of men, God uses that wrong human counsel to accomplish His sovereign judgments.

There's a principle here you should never forget: *You can't win if you go against the Lord.* That ought to be perfectly obvious, but people won't accept it. Maybe some like a challenge, I don't know.

But you can't win against the Lord. I often see this in counseling with people. God's Word clearly confronts their sin, but they don't want to face that, because it means they would have to repent and change. So they make excuses for their behavior and go find other counselors who tell them what they wanted to hear in the first place, thinking that this counsel will get them where they want to go. But it never brings them lasting happiness, because you can't win if you go against the Lord!

7. Half-hearted commitment means falling prey to pride.

Amaziah starts thinking that he's pretty hot stuff. "Did you see how I dealt with the Edomites?" So he challenges Joash, king of Israel, to a showdown. Joash answers with an allegory that means, "You're just a little thorn bush compared with me as a mighty cedar tree. You're going to get trampled." That eggs Amaziah on. So he goes to battle and gets creamed. Apparently he was so badly crippled that the king of Israel figured that it wouldn't hurt him to let him stay on the throne. So he tore down 600 feet of the wall facing to the north and left Amaziah there. He never recovered his power.

Pride goes before a fall. A person who is not wholeheartedly for the Lord is not judging his sin. The only way to avoid pride is to deal with the sin which so easily besets us. Half-hearted commitment results in inevitable ruin. We've seen the half-heartedness.

A PORTRAIT OF THE RESULTING RUIN.

Some of Amaziah's ruin was immediate, but some took a while. God's judgments don't always follow *swiftly* by our reckoning. But they do follow *inevitably*. It may take a while for the seeds sown to the flesh to spring up and produce corruption, but the crop never fails.

1. Immediate results: God's people were defeated and defenseless.

(See 25:23-24.) A city with a 600 foot hole in its wall was defenseless. Jerusalem and the southern kingdom could not be strong under these conditions. Some of the people were taken as hostages. The few items of gold and silver left in the Temple and king's house (which Joash had not lost to the Syrians, or which Amaziah may have restored) were taken. The worship life of God's people

was at a low ebb, thanks to Amaziah. Half-hearted commitment always weakens the entire church, especially when the half-heartedness is in the leadership.

2. Long-range results: Wasted years and a pointless death for Amaziah.

(See 25:25, 27, 28.) His power was gone. His riches were gone. His army was defeated. The last 15 years--more than half of his 29 as king--were futile and wasted. When Amaziah turned from following the Lord, it gave rise to discontent which eventually led to a conspiracy. The very thing he tried to prevent by executing his father's murderers came upon him. He fled to the stronghold city of Lachish on the Philistine border. But it could not protect him if the Lord was not protecting him. He was murdered, carried home, and buried. Ho-hum. The epitaph of a blah believer, whose heart was not wholly for the Lord.

Conclusion

But there's a positive side to this story: While half-hearted commitment results in inevitable ruin, *full commitment results in eternal rewards*. In just about every one of these stories of the kings there is a group of men who come on the stage, say their piece, and disappear again. Sometimes, such as Hanani, Micaiah, Jehu (the son of Hanani), and Zechariah (the son of Jehoiada), they are named. In other cases (as in chapter 25) they remain anonymous. But they were known to God. They are the prophets (25:7, 15).

When I read of them, I always wonder what they did when they weren't on an assignment. It's as if God kept them in a garage somewhere, always ready to roll at a moment's notice (like Clark Kent, Superman). After they do their job, if they don't get killed, they go back and wait for the next assignment. It was a hazardous occupation. Zechariah had been stoned to death by Amaziah's father Joash. Amaziah reminds this nameless prophet of that incident (25:16). The life insurance folks wouldn't have touched these prophets with a ten foot pole!

But they were God's men--totally committed to Him, available, and even expendable. Nameless to us, but known to God, they stand in stark contrast to the blah life of Amaziah. Amaziah was more famous. For a while he had more power and more riches.

But these courageous prophets knew life as it is meant to be lived. When they passed from this earth--as kings, prophets, and commoners all must do--these committed men heard the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:23).

To call Amaziah "half-hearted" isn't technically correct. Satan doesn't need half your life to gain entry and bring you to ruin. He only needs a single area where you refuse to let Jesus be Lord. If you give everything to Jesus except that one area, it's enough for Satan. A Haitian pastor told this story that illustrates what I'm saying:

A certain man wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted very badly to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door.

After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the single nail he still owned. Soon the house became unlivable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail on his terms.

The Haitian pastor's conclusion: "If we leave the devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation."

Pollster George Gallup contends that fewer than 10 percent of evangelical Christians could be called deeply committed. But full commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life for you, is the only way to go. Blah Christianity is not an option. I'm sure that Amaziah thought he would gain happiness and success going the way he went. Half-hearted Christians are afraid of full commitment, because they think it will result in a dreary or difficult life. But we need to keep in mind the words of Jesus: "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:35).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between being wise in using all of the latest available methods and God's wisdom? Are the two necessarily in opposition? What is the sanctifying factor?
2. What is the difference between being ambitious for yourself and for the Lord, especially in Christian work?
3. What does being fully committed to the Lord mean? How can it be measured?
4. Does full commitment mean going "full-bore" all the time? How do we achieve the proper balance between full commitment and necessary rest/recreation?

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