Amaziah, the Hired Soldiers, and the Perfect Heart

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Amaziah — Right, but Not with a Perfect Heart

Second Chronicles 25:1–2 introduces Amaziah with a qualification that has much to teach: he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart. He was a good king. He did right. But something was not complete. And the chapter that follows shows what incompleteness looks like in practice — in a man who does right but has not given his whole heart to what he is doing.

Amaziah's campaign was against the children of Seir — the Edomites, the people whose ancestry went back to Esau. And Esau is the Bible's portrait of profanity: the man who treated holy things as common. He sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. He made sacred things worthless by his indifference to them. The world does the same. It speaks of the name of Christ, of heaven and hell, of life and death and the love of God as though they were dirt — of no particular weight or significance. But these things are not common. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That is not a trivial thing to stumble across. It is the most significant reality any soul will ever encounter.

The Hired Soldiers — Brave, Strong, Cheap, and from the Wrong Country

Amaziah had 300,000 choice men of his own. He decided that was not enough, so he hired 100,000 more from the ten tribes of Israel — for one hundred talents of silver. The hired men were mighty men of valor: brave, strong, and cheap. One thousand soldiers for one talent of silver — a piece of silver you could hold in

your hands. That is a low price for a man who might die in battle.

But there were four things about those hundred thousand soldiers. They were brave. They were strong. They were inexpensive. And they came from a kingdom where the prophets of Jehovah were sometimes killed, where the people worshipped at Dan and Beersheba at golden calves instead of coming to Jerusalem where God had put His name. The same situation as Jehoshaphat, who made peace with Ahab and sat while Ahab declared his hatred of the prophet Micaiah. Brave and strong and cheap are not the criteria. The question is always: is the Lord with them?

A man of God came to Amaziah before the battle: O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee, for the Lord is not with Israel — to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. And then: but if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle — the sarcasm in the prophet's words is unmistakeable — God shall make thee fall before the enemy, for God hath power to help and to cast down. God has power to help or to cast down, as He wills. He is sovereign. Amaziah should never have expected God to simply help while ignoring the question of whether those men were the Lord's.

The Lord is able to give thee much more than this. — 2 Chronicles 25:9

The Prophet's Word — The Lord Is Able to Give Much More

Amaziah's response to the man of God is revealing: but what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? He had already paid them. The money was gone. He wanted it back — or rather, he wanted the value of it, the soldiers for his army that he had purchased. The man of God's answer is one of the most clarifying statements in the book: the Lord is able to give thee much more than this. Don't worry about the money. The Lord's provision is not limited to what a hundred talents of silver can buy.

That word speaks directly to every situation where obedience costs something we have already paid out. The natural heart says: I want it back, I want it now, I cannot afford to lose that. There is no patience in that, no bowing to the will of God. But the prophet says: the Lord is able to give thee much more than this. One smile of approval from the Lord Jesus looking down from heaven on a soul that has obeyed Him at cost is worth more than any earthly accounting can measure. His desire at the judgment seat of Christ is already formed — He wants to say, well done, thou good and faithful servant. That is what awaits faithful obedience, not the hundred talents we had to let go.

Amaziah did send the soldiers home. But what happened next shows the danger that had been avoided. Those soldiers, with money in their pockets and anger in their hearts — for their anger was greatly kindled — fell upon the cities of Judah from Samaria even unto Bethhoron and smote three thousand of them and took much spoil. Families destroyed. Crops ruined. Houses burned. And this was not because Amaziah disobeyed — it was because he had obeyed. That seems at first like a contradiction. But the point is this: that was the lesser disaster. If those hundred thousand angry hearts had come into the battle alongside the army of Judah, the outcome would have been far worse. God's way is always best, even when obedience to it involves a cost we can measure. We got off easy this time, the prophet would have said. It would have been much worse.

The Perfect Heart — Hope Set on Him

First John 3:1–3 brings the lesson to its fullest expression. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God. Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.

Amaziah did what was right, but not with a perfect heart. A perfect heart — or a complete heart — in the New Testament sense has to do with that hope set on Him. Many believers do what is right, serve the Lord faithfully, give the gospel, walk in much that is good, and yet do not have the blessed hope of the Lord's coming before them as a living, practical, daily reality. When the truth of the Lord's coming was first recovered and restored in the early part of the nineteenth century, those who received it were notably unworldly. This world was not an attraction to them. Having one's hope set on Him — not merely the doctrine of His coming, but Him as the one expected — that is what produces separation from the world and completeness in our walk.

We all know what it is to suffer loss in this world. Sorrows, sickness, bereavements, things that slip from our hands. The blessing of the Lord, says Proverbs 10, maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow to it. And the Lord is able to give much more than this — much more than anything this world holds, much more than what we have lost, much more than what we can imagine. The Lord Jesus is the firstfruits, and the firstfruits in the window of heaven are a picture of all that is coming. May the Lord give each of us grace to have our hearts set on Him — looking for Him, separated to Him, walking for His glory — with a perfect heart.

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