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FEARLESS SINNERS GET FEARFUL REWARDS!

Today's Text: 1 Kings, Chapters 14-16; Luke 6: 46-49

Extracts:

1. **“And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” [Lk 6: 46]**
2. **“At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam, and get thee to Shiloh: behold there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people....But Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age. And the Lord said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son, for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her; for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman. (As soon as she came into the prophet's house, he said) Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people and made thee prince over my people Israel and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to thee; and yet thou hast not been as My servant David,...behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam” [1 Kgs 14: 1-2,4-5,7-8,10]**

*George Orwell, the author of **Animal Farm** (1945) is also well known for another book, **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949). This second novel was set in an oppressive state called Oceana, ruled by The Party with a figurehead leader known as Big Brother who was always watching you. Big Brother's ever-vigilant eyes were the Thought Police who monitored everybody everywhere through the use of telescreens. There was one man called Winston Smith who was bent on rebelling against the system. He worked in the Ministry of Truth where he met pretty Julia who loved him. The only way to express their love was to move out of the view of the telescreens and the Thought Police. So, they rented a room with a proletarian shopkeeper where they carried out liaisons. One day, they were caught in the act, and it turned out that the shopkeeper was a member of the Thought Police. Winston and Julia were re-indoctrinated and turned from intelligent, strong-willed rebels into mere puppets of the party.¹*

When we accept Christ as Lord and Saviour, we have chosen a lifestyle that is only different from Oceana in the mode of operations. We are required to obey God's commandments by conviction, not by compulsion. In place of Big Brother, we have God Himself and “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” [Prov. 15:3]. The Thought Police is our conscience, for “the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly” [Prov. 20: 27]. So, we cannot hide from Him! However, many of us behave as if we can do so and successfully too. We refuse to obey Him and yet profess to be practising Christians In today's lesson, we shall show that fearless sinners are only inviting fearful repercussions to themselves and their descendants.

¹ “1984”, <http://www2.itexas.net/~jburks/1984.htm>

1. Who is a fearless sinner?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I say unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity [Matt. 7: 20-23]

Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul said [Contemporary English Version]:

In my other letter, I told you not to have anything to do with immoral people. But I wasn't talking about the people of this world. You would have to leave this world to get away from everyone who is immoral or greedy or who cheats or worships idols. I was talking about your own people who are immoral or greedy or worship idols or curse others or get drunk or cheat. Don't even eat with them! Why should I judge outsiders? Aren't we supposed to judge only church members? God judges everyone else. The Scriptures say, "Chase away any of your own people who are evil" [1 Cor. 5: 9-13]

From those references, we get the uncomfortable feeling that the "fearless sinner" is not far-fetched. S(he) is right there in the congregation, supposedly working for the Lord. However, s(he) is living a double life. Let us illustrate with the sins that Paul listed above.

a) *Believers who are immoral*

We live in a secular world where morality has different meanings to different people. For some people, once law allows it, there is nothing wrong with it. For example, if law permits abortion, then it is all right for a doctor to set up an abortion clinic. But should a doctor who is a true believer run one or even participate in abortion operations? Should a believer who winds up with "an unwanted pregnancy" take advantage of the law to abort it? Should a parent who finds herself embarrassed by her 13-year old daughter's pregnancy subscribe to an abortion? It is the same question that Jesus asked the scribes and Pharisees, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" [Matt. 15: 3].

Another form of immorality practised by believers relates to sexual conduct. Many of us think that it is only fornication or adultery when there is physical sexual union between a man and a woman. Therefore, masturbation, oral sex and pornography are harmless! However, Jesus has

settled the matter, for “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” [Matt. 5: 28].

Many well-placed believers are in a marriage union that is either fornication or adultery in the eyes of God. When two previously unmarried (or widowed) people are merely cohabiting, that is fornication. Where a party marries a divorced person whose spouse is still alive, they are living in adultery. These points are clearly settled in the words of Jesus, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery; and whoso married her which is put away doth commit adultery” [Matt. 19: 9]. Therefore, the justification “to move on” that we hear in our churches is man’s tradition, not God’s commandment.

We are familiar with other forms of immorality being perpetrated in our churches, such as priests defiling altar boys, and clergy and laity involved in homosexual acts or as a way of life. Those are abominations in the sight of God [Rom. 1: 24-32].

b) *Believers who are greedy or worship idols or cheat*

Many believers think that they are not idol worshippers because they do not bow before graven images. Yet, in every respect, that is what they do everyday! They worship money and position and would steal, kill or destroy to attain them. Some Christian bosses treat their employees/subordinates with disrespect, and deny them their pay or promotion at the due time. Many Christian workers abuse or steal company property and time and cheat on their taxes and other civic responsibilities. How do such things make us Christ’s ambassadors?

c) *Believers who curse or get drunk*

You need to hear what comes out from the mouths of some believers. They crack or listen to dirty jokes. They use curse words every now and then. At the slightest provocation, they curse their spouses or children, friends or colleagues. Yet, Jesus has warned, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” [Matt. 12: 36-37].

Church leaders [bishops and deacons] are enjoined to avoid wine [1 Tim. 3: 3, 8], and anybody who sees himself or herself as the temple of the living God will certainly avoid wine or alcoholic drinks [Lk 1: 15]. You need to see the way some believers behave with wine and alcoholic drinks. The Scriptures say, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” [Prov. 20: 1].

In summary, we see a fearless sinner as a person who claims to be a believer but is far from one in his/her heart. S(he) behaves on the principle of “Thou shalt not be caught,” which I call the Eleventh Commandment! S(he) fears to go to human jails and works very hard to cover his/her trails. However, s(he) does not fear God or hell. Quoting **Isaiah 29: 13**, Jesus calls such people “hypocrites” who “draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoureth Me with their lips; *but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me*, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” [**Matt. 15: 7-9**].

2. Jeroboam was one such fearless sinner!

Jeroboam was the son of an Ephrathite [**1 Kgs 11: 26**] like David’s father, Jesse [**1 Sam. 17: 12**]. He was Solomon’s servant and a mighty man of valour. When Solomon saw that he was industrious, he made him ruler over people doing forced labour from the house of Joseph [**1 Kgs 11: 26-28**]. As he was leaving Jerusalem to go and assume duty, he encountered a prophet called Ahijah in the fields and they were alone. The prophet caught hold of the new garment that Jeroboam was wearing and tore it into 12 pieces. He gave ten pieces to Jeroboam and said, “Take thee ten pieces; for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee” [**vv. 28-31**].

Jeroboam was specifically told that Solomon was going to be punished for not obeying the commandments of God, and “I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel” [**vv. 32-37**]. For Jeroboam, that was an *unmerited* favour, which transformed him overnight from servant to prince. In like manner, because of the blood of Jesus that has been shed for us on Calvary, we have received *unmerited* access to God who now regards us as “joint-heirs” with Christ [**Rom. 8: 17**] once we accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour.

Apparently, his conduct betrayed his ambition and Solomon sought to kill him. So, Jeroboam fled to Egypt where he remained until the death of Solomon [**1 Kgs 11: 40-43**]. He returned soon after and was made king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel in accordance with God’s promise to him by prophet Ahijah [**1 Kgs 12: 16-24**]. What would you expect somebody that God had so richly blessed to do? In his heart, he thought that he did the right thing to build an altar in Shechem [to rival Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem] and to appoint priests to perform sacrifices on it. On both counts, he wound up offending God. First, he was practising idol worship when he told his people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Second, he appointed unqualified people to be priests, “the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.” He inaugurated feast days, which were not consonant with the word of God. *In all these, he took and received counsel from the people* [**vv. 25-33**]. In deed, they honoured God on the outside but not from their hearts [**Is. 29:13**].

In keeping with His promise that He would not do anything unless He first revealed His secret to us through His servants the prophets [**Amos 3:7**], God sent a young prophet from Judah to warn Jeroboam about his sinful ways. Instead of obeying, he wanted to arrest the messenger but God struck his hand which dried up. However, God showed him mercy and healed him [**1 Kgs 13: 1-6**]. But, did he change his ways? No. In fact, he got worse. He appointed more debased persons as priests and “this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth” [**vv. 33-34**].

Believers do put themselves in a similar situation. God gives us wealth and power and we squander them on sinful ventures. Rather, by the special grace of God, we have been saved by the blood of Jesus, and called to be labourers in His vineyard. In other words, we have been saved by grace *for works*, that is, “fear God, and keep His commandments; *for this is the whole duty of man*” [**Eccl. 12: 13**]. In the process, we may sin, and “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [**1 Jn 1: 9**]. However, if our confession is not sincere, we are like Jeroboam saying that we have no sin and “if we say that we have no sin, *we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*” [**v. 8**]. At that stage, we become fearless sinners like Jeroboam.

3. Here come the fearful rewards!

Having demonstrated that he did not deserve God’s grace by worshipping God hypocritically, God gave him up. Soon after, his son, Abijah, fell ill. He asked his wife to disguise herself and go to the prophet through whom God had spoken to him about the kingship of Israel to find out what would happen to the child [**1 Kgs 14: 1-3**]. Before the lady’s arrival, God had told the prophet, Ahijah, what to expect and what to say. The message was clear:

*Go tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people and made thee prince over My people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee; and yet thou hast not been as My servant David who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in Mine eyes, but has done evil above all that were before thee...Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam [**vv.7-10**].*

Things happened rapidly. As soon as the woman returned home, the sick child died as the Lord had said [**v.12**]. He was the only member of Jeroboam’s family that was ever buried honourably [**v.13**]. In the 18th year of Jeroboam’s reign [he reigned for 22 years], Abijam [or Abijah as in **2 Chron. 13:1**], the son of Rehoboam the son of Solomon became the king of Judah. He rose to reclaim part of the territory of Israel under Jeroboam. As he arraigned his 400,000 troops against Jeroboam’s 800,000 chosen men, he cried to God “and it came to pass that

God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.” Five hundred thousand men or 63% of Jeroboam’s army were killed. Bethel and several other important cities were seized. Jeroboam could not regain strength “and the Lord struck him and he died” [2 Chron. 13: 1-20]. Judah prevailed “because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers” [v. 18]. Nadab, who succeeded his father, Jeroboam, lasted for only two years. Baasha, from the house of Issachar, conspired against and killed him. Baasha took over the throne and wiped out every living being of Jeroboam’s house as God had said through the prophet Ahijah [1 Kgs 15:29]. Isn’t that fearful?

4. Conclusion

It is very easy to be a fearless sinner. All it takes is to refuse God access to *all aspects* of your life. You cannot hide anything from Him because you cannot hide from Him! David said, “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?” [Ps. 139: 7]. The answer is obvious. Unfortunately, some of us believe that they can hide and get away with it. When the fearful repercussions start pouring in, such people are the first to blame their enemies! They refuse to draw a connection between their disobedience and the judgment.

As we have said over and over, those who abuse grace will be disgraced. It is only a fool that dreads to go to jail but not hell. The ball is in your court!