**What May Not Appear as Sin Can Really Displease God (JD07)**

A long time ago, when my daughter was quite young, she was helping me wash the dishes. After rinsing the soapy plates, she would hand them to me so that I could dry them. So what did I do? Right before her eyes, I rewashed the dishes to make sure that they were really clean. Obviously, my daughter was displeased since she could see that I did not have too much faith in her work! Not wanting to dishearten her, I made up some bogus excuse to assure her that I wasn’t rewashing them because her work was not good enough. Looking back, I am not too sure whether she bought that. Today’s study is about why our lack of faith in God displeases Him, and how that can result in missed opportunities and blessings in life.

**Q:** Share about the time when someone’s lack of confidence in you (e.g., parent, coach, friend, teacher or pastor) really affected you.

**The writer’s example:** The following happened more than 40 years ago but I still remember it.

As a member of the badminton team of my elementary school, I played in a doubles match in a tournament. When it became apparent that we were going to lose, due mostly to my inability to

play well, my partner, who was a better play than me, asked the coach whether he can go solo! The fact that I still remember that after all these years indicates that it really stung me.

**A. What is faith?** Before examining the faith of Barak & Jephthah, a preliminary work on faith needs

to be established in order to correctly gauge their faith.

1. There are three types of faith presented in the Bible. **Q:** Anyone care to guess?

**R:** (1) *Saving faith*, which is the initial faith in Christ that saves us; (2) *Living faith*, which is

trusting God in our daily living; (3) *Gift of faith* (1 Cor. 12:9), which is given to certain

individuals to display an uncommon faith not restrained by doubts, particularly in adversity.

This study deals with (2) *Living faith*: Choosing God’s way in our daily decisions even

though it doesn’t look much like a winner at the moment.

2. Let’s define faith. No verse is more clear about what faith is than Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith

is being sure of what we hope for and certain what do not see.” What does this mean?

3. The New Atheist author Sam Harris (*The End of Faith* 2003) interpreted this passage in the following manner: “Read in the right way, this passage seems to render faith entirely self-

justifying: perhaps the very fact that one believes in something which has not yet come to

pass or for which one has no evidence constitutes evidence for its actuality.”

**Q:** This isn’t entirely wrong but 3 key components to biblical faith are missing. What are they?

**R:** Our confidence that what we hope for will come to pass in the future is not based on nothing, as

Harris asserts, but on three evidential things:

(1) God’s promises clearly delineated in the Scriptures such as Phil. 4:19a (“God will meet all

your needs”); (2) Previous experiences of what God has done in the past (Jos. 4:20: “In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the

Jordan on dry ground’”); (3) Most importantly, the character of God Himself (that He is good & kind as Acts 14:17 asserts: “[God] has shown kindness . . . and fills your hearts with joy”).

4. Then Harris offered this parody: “I feel a certain, rather thrilling ‘conviction’ that Nicole

Kidman is in love with me. As we have never met, my feeling is my only evidence of her

infatuation. I reason thus, my feelings suggest that Nicole and I must have a special, even

metaphysical, connection—otherwise, how could I have this feeling in the first place? I

decide to set up camp outside her house to make the necessary introductions” (p. 64).

**Q:** His analogy falls short, for it doesn’t correlate with our relationship with God. What’s wrong?

**R:** While Harris has never met this Australian actress, we have met the one whom we love: God. While Harris does not know Kidman, those who are in Christ know God, and are known by

Him. (“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered”—Mat. 10:30).

**B. Relationship between pleasing God and the lack of faith in Him**

Hebrews 11:6 reads: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

1. This is a hard-hitting statement: Impossible or not able (from a compound Greek word, *a*+ *dunatos*: not+able) to please God due to the lack of faith in His existence as well as fairness.

2. One event that underscores the displeasure of God over our lack of faith in Him is what happened to the father of John the Baptist who couldn’t quite believe what he was told by an

angel, that his wife was going to have a son in her old age. Read Luke 1:20.

Lk. 1:20: “And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens,

because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.”

**Q:** God takes our lack of faith in Him is so *personally*; what does this say about God?

Consider Ps. 8:4 (“What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”); Mat 13:58 (“And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith”);

2 Chron. 25:14-15 (“When Amaziah returned from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down to them and burned sacrifices to them. 15 The anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and he sent a prophet to him, who said, ‘Why do you consult this people’s gods, which could not save their own people from your hand?’”)

**R:** Ps. 8:4 should make us feel very flattered & humbling, that the creator of the universe would care that much about puny men; Mat. 13:58 shows that God’s displeasure over our lack of faith is for our sake since faith on our part is needed for the Lord to work (including saving us);

2 Chron. 25:14-15 shows distrusting God’s “ability” to guide and provide is in effect dismissing Him in favor of putting confidence in that which is not god.

**C. Analyzing the living faith exercised by the two judges: Barak & Jephthah**

1. Barak: Read 4:4-10, 14-22. In order for us to better understand the circumstances, imagine his statute as that of a NFL lineman & Deborah as a petite cheerleader (with more clothes on, of course).

**Q1:** Was Deborah pleased with his response upon being summoned to lead the troop into battle? Notice that God had informed Barak the specific way in which He was going to defeat the enemy (4:7, 5:21: “The river Kishon swept them away”).

**R:** Barak’s refusal to go unless Deborah went with him (“If you don’t go with me, I won’t go”)

displeased her who said: “Very well, I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman” (4:9).

This was meant as an insult to Barak since women wasn’t valued much at that time. So it was

Jael, a common house wife, who ended up killing Sisera (4:17, 21). In effect, Deborah’s displeasure was reflecting God’s sentiment.

**Q2**: Why the insecurity? What difference would the presence of a woman make in a war?

**R:** Barak, seeing that Sisera’s army had superior weapons (900 iron chariots), had reasons to fear despite having 10,000 men at his side. Obviously, he didn’t want Deborah for what she could do physically but for her spiritual presence, meaning, Barak didn’t feel confident that God would do what He said he would to defeat the enemy (i.e., flooding the river Kishon to drown them) unless Deborah stood next to him (as his crutch or lucky charm).

There are times when such attitude maybe construed as humility (as in, “Brothers, I can’t do it alone, I need your help”), but the urgency of the situation and God’s clear assurance demanded that Barak “ride the bicycle without training wheels” (i.e., trust God).

2. Judge Jephthah did a similar thing. Read 11:28-48 and focus on 29-30.

**Q1**: In what way is “If you give me the Ammonites into my hands, I will sacrifice the first thing that

comes out of my house when I return home” similar to Barak’s “If you don’t go with me, I won’t go”? Notice what God did in verse 29 to secure the victory for him.

**R:** God had given what Jephthah needed for a victory: allowing His Spirit to come upon him (just like Barak was told that God had a plan to defeat the enemy). But this mighty warrior, like Barak, needed additional assurance, so he made a great sounding but ultimately rash vow. Some believe that he was thinking of animals but more likely he wasn’t thinking at all. Other commentators think that he was thinking of some house servants coming out to greet him. Common sense would’ve told him that his only daughter might be the first one out the door to greet her dad since he had been away for a while.

**Q2:** Ultimately, why was his vow such an affront to God?

**R:** In effect, Jephthah did not endear himself to God by bargaining with Him, as if the Lord wouldn’t give him the promised victory unless he made a human sacrifice (a Canaanite practice). That’s a puny and distorted view of God and His character!

3. Final point: Despite their imperfect faith, God used these two men to deliver Israel from her oppressors. Moreover, their names are found in Hebrew 11:32 as examples of certain OT

people who demonstrated faith in God, as Barak finally did, later.

**Q:** What does this say about God?

**R:**This speaks of God’s immense grace: giving us what we don’t deserve! The Lord uses us, not because we’re so naturally & spiritually wonderful, but because He so loves the hurting & needy people that God is willing to use any inadequate person who at least made himself available to God. But wouldn’t this view discourage us from changing to better ourselves?

4. The good news is that His grace & mercy do change us. Barak wasn’t rejected at his refusal to go into battle without Deborah (implying that the Lord’s presence alone was inadequate for victory), but He was shown mercy! In 4:14-16, we already see the change in Barak.

**Q1**: What change do you see in Barak when told by Deborah, “Go” (without her)?

**R:** This time, he simply went because he believed what he was told: “This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands.” That’s the change!

**Q2**: How should this make us feel, especially when we are in a poor spiritual condition?

**R:** I think this should encourage us not to lose hope in the Lord, especially when our walk is not all that great! The realization that God is still with us and uses us, that is, despite of us, is the very impetus that can motivate as to make positive changes in our lives.

**D. Application**: Share your experience of either giving into fear or overcoming it to obey what you believed was God’s will for your life at that moment. It could be in any area of our lives.

**The writer’s example:**  After being saved in California at the age of 20, I stayed there and visited my parents in Virginia once a year. One year, before I left for home I felt the Lord telling me to tell my dad that I loved him. I had never done that before, particular because we had a very rocky relationship. It was the night before my return to California and I still hadn’t done it. Maybe it was due to fear, embarrassment, or combination of both. But the thought of not doing it despite being told by the Lord to do it and having to wait another year finally got me to say those very words that my dad never heard from my lips: “I love you dad” (in Korean). My dad did not know what to say but I am sure he liked it.