

Listening to parents and to God

A few sparrows came to feed on left over bread crumbs after we had our braai-lunch on Sunday. They are so very, very small in comparison to other birds that also came around – shrikes, Cape weavers and so on.

I could not help to remember that Jesus said that sparrows have almost no monetary value – after all, not even the poorest person can squeeze a meal out of one, even 2 of them.

Then the Lord reminded me of his words that his Father in heaven looks after these tiny little sparrows. It was a humbling thought that we were instrumental in God's hand to feed these few he also looks after. We did not do much of God's work lately. We did not feed a hungry person and I did not preach Christ's gospel.

But we did God's work in feeding a sparrow on his behalf.

It was a humbling, emotional thought.

It is not for me to decide how big or small the job must be that I do for Jesus today. The mere fact that he calls me to do something, is an immense privilege. It also means that he remembers us. We are still in his employment.

It was a wow moment, because this lesson from our Lord ended with reminding me of the old song about God looking after the sparrow:

***His eye is on the sparrow –
And I know, he watches me!***

We all know the influence of parents on their children. We say things like:

- "It runs in the family."

- "Like father, like son."

- "He is a chip off the old block."

These sayings all express the truth that children are a lot like their parents.

And yet, parents are the first to admit that each child is unique and different. If there are 3 children in a family, all 3 are different and unique. These differences within a family are also to be found when it comes to Christianity. Within the typical Christian family, all the children receive the same upbringing: all are disciplined the same way, all are sent to Sunday School regularly, all sit through 18 or more years of family devotions. And yet, some grow up to be faithful, solid church members and others drift away soon after confirmation. Why do some of our sons and daughters follow Jesus and love him and others do not?

We are looking at this from a human perspective. We know that people are saved by God by grace, through faith. But let's today limit ourselves to the question of what we see on the part of men and women that determine that some follow Jesus and others leave the ways of the Lord.

High priest Eli's own sons Hophni and Phinehas and Samuel, Hannah's son raised by the high priest, received the same upbringing. Yet Scripture tells us that Hophni and Phinehas treated the Lord's offering with contempt (1 Sam 2:17) when they, in their greed, took the meat that belonged to the Lord for themselves. In talking about these young men, Scripture has nothing good to say. We are told they were wicked (2:12), they sinned against the Lord (2:25), they made themselves contemptible (3:13). And, we are told it was the Lord's will to put them to death (2:25).

As it so often does, the Bible presents a contrast. In contrast to the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas is the service and ministry of Samuel. Four times we are told that Samuel "ministered before the Lord" (2:11,18,35; 3:1). We are told that he slept in the tabernacle, beside the ark (3:3f). He wore a linen ephod and robe (2:18), in other words, he served as a personal servant of the Lord. Furthermore, we are told that Samuel "grew up in the presence of the Lord" (vs 21). We are also told: (1 Sam 2:26) *And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men.* Both the Lord and the people were fond of Samuel!

These very same words many years later described the childhood of Jesus.

Why do some children follow God's ways and others do not? Why are some Christ like, and others are not?

Hophni and Phinehas did not fear the Lord. The Bible tells us "they had no regard for the Lord" (2:12), they did not know the Lord, even though they knew about him. Samuel, on the other hand feared the Lord, knew the Lord and served God with joyful obedience.

We have to carefully distinguish between knowing about a person and actually knowing that person. All in South Africa know about Madiba, yet few can call Nelson Mandela a personal friend. Hophni and Phinehas knew about the Lord, but the Lord was Samuel's life long friend. That made the difference.

Samuel listened to Eli and to God. Hophni and Phinehas only listened to their sinful hearts. Samuel was saved and the other two died without reconciling with God. That made the difference. Not so much the upbringing, but the willingness to listen and to obey. And personal friendship with God.

Are your children truly friends of God? Do they love Jesus? Do both people and the Lord grow more fond of them every day? That will make the difference.

Do you follow Jesus? Do you worship sincerely, with joyful obedience and authentic prayer? Do you find the greatest joy in doing the work of God.

Do you listen to the voice of God? Do you know him as a friend.

May the voice of God both comfort and excite you!