

## Shields and Shishaks

Coming through another winter Olympic season, we have all undoubtedly heard the oft-repeated phrase in the commercials and elsewhere to “Go for the Gold!”. It is the verbal and vivid reminder to anyone engaged in competitive sport (or any other arena for that matter) - to excel and be the best in their particular discipline. To this day, I have never heard anyone say to a fellow colleague: “Go for the Silver” or “Go for the Bronze!”. The fact that there are runners up that finish in second and third place is fundamental, but the ambition of all the participants from the outset is to do well and to win.

When applying this principle to our spiritual life in Christ, we should have the same standard of excellence for the best of Masters. In writing to the Philippian believers, Paul exhorted the saints there to “*approve the things that are excellent*”, Phil. 1:10. He did not encourage them to lower the bar or change the standard from the previous generation with the claim that “times have changed”. Not at all. Paul would later challenge the saints at Philippi by example when he stated in clarion tones, “*I press for the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*”, Phil. 3:14. It is that indeed – a high and holy calling, issued from the One who said “*Be ye holy, for I am holy...*”, 1 Peter 1: 15. It was his standard of excellence and one that he desired for them also, requiring dedication and diligence and a steadfast pressing on with a high standard to attain to and hold.

When Shishak, King of Egypt invaded Jerusalem during Rehoboam’s reign, (1 Kings 14:25-28), he took away the gold shields in the temple that Solomon had built. Over five hundred shields of hammered gold occupied that temple (1 Kings 10:16-17), a plethora of precious items that characterized the glorious kingdom of Solomon and house of the Lord. But because of rank failure among the Lord’s people (1 Kings 14:23-24), these shields were taken away by the Egyptians and God’s protection of the nation was removed as well. These Egyptian intruders entered the land and took away the heritage of God’s people and the things that were counted dear to the nation. But rather than repenting, Rehoboam *replaced* the gold shields with bronze ones, shields which looked the same but were in actuality, a cheap substitute. They were still handled with pomp and ceremony and also treated with care (v. 28), but certainly did not possess the value of the shields that were taken away.

I have often pondered this incident from the Scriptures and have wondered if it does not have a parallel for us today. Are there precious truths once held dear to a previous generation that somehow have been taken away from us? Have we lost our grip on them and have allowed the world to snatch them away because of the intrusion of modern-day Shishaks? I have sensed it in my own life and ask if it is true of others also? What has happened to those gold shields – the discipline of personal prayer and devotional time, the regular reading of the Scriptures, the faithful attendance to the meetings of the church, the extended fellowship with the Lord’s people? All precious protective shields, for sure in our walk with Christ. It does not stop there – perhaps it has an application to the local church as well. The lack of fellowship, the abbreviated schedule of meetings, the emphasis on music over sound biblical teaching and worship as the centerpiece of the church. Maybe not, but maybe so. How easy it is for us to ignore the biblical injunction to take heed to the things that we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip from our grasp, Heb. 2:1. Worse, is the temptation to replace them with those things which have a resemblance but are cheap look-alikes – casual attendance, token prayer time, cursory devotions and the like. We can all fill in the blank as to what those substitutes are in our experience.

Paul told Timothy to “lay hold of eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12). Solomon urged, “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23) and to “remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set”, Prov. 22:28. Whatever the cost, we are not allow Shishak take away the gold that is the standard of the house of the Lord. Whether it is Shishak or Amalek who stole David’s possessions (1 Sam 30.2), or the Philistines who

choked up Abraham's wells with dirt (Gen. 26:18), every generation needs to discover, uncover, or recover the words of truth and like Israel, possess their possessions, Obad. 17.

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