

June 7, 2015

SACKCLOTH UNDERNEATH

by Neal Pollard

The first time I recall understanding the significance of the story in 2 Kings 6:30 was sitting in a class taught by Wendell Winkler. He called the lesson “Hidden Cares.” He told us to remember that sitting in the audience each week we preached would be any number of folks carrying around hidden cares. In over twenty years of full-time preaching, I become more aware of that every day. Recently reading about the woman in Mark five who had been suffering for twelve years, I was reminded of this as I thought about the faces of individuals I see all the time suffering in a variety of ways. While we usually know some of the burdens our brothers and sisters are bearing, there are still many others whose troubles are not as widely known.

Jehoram is no Old Testament hero, but is rather a wicked Israelite king. He does not make the cut for the Hebrews eleven list and he does not even behave properly regarding Elisha after the event mentioned in the verse above, but he does illustrate the many who walk around with hidden cares. The verse reads, “When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes-now he was passing by on the wall-and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body.”

The sackcloth was coarsely woven cloth, often made of goat’s hair. It was worn to show mourning and submission to God. No doubt, wearing one of these for any length of time would bring itching, irritation, and discomfort. The garment was apparently meant to reflect outwardly the feelings of the heart and affliction of the spirit of the wearer.

Whether we are preaching or teaching or simply dealing with one another, may we keep a few things in mind. At any given point, the person with whom we are dealing is likely wearing their own “hidden sackcloth.” We may not be able to tell this by looking at their facial expressions or through any verbal cues when we converse. Further, the hidden cares they carry may affect the way they respond to us. Let us not assume they are upset with us or that it is even about us at all. Finally, keep in mind that people cope with their hidden cares in different ways. It is no reflection on the quality of our friendship or relationship if they do not share it. Each of us must determine how, when, and with whom we disclose these things. Let us pray for family, church family, coworkers, neighbors, and others with whom we have relationship as they wear these unseen cares.

To those with sackcloth underneath, remember that God has made us family. There are those you can trust to help bear the burdens. Pray about this and then act. Let these cares refine your relationship with God and sharpen your focus on the place where there will be no such cares. Remember that God is gracious and will not give you more than you can bear. This may seem doubtful at times, but on the other side of the sorrow it will be clear.

No matter how “spiffily” or “slobbily” one is dressed, be aware that underneath may be that figurative sackcloth. May this drive us to be more compassionate and understanding in our dealings with one another.