

July 27, 2013

EKEV/It Came to Pass

A drifting attention span is normal for young children, and it isn't totally foreign to adults either. Have you ever intended to make that phone call, or write that "thank-you" note, or return that rake you borrowed, but just never seemed to get around to it? Our desire to do the right thing may be real, but intention isn't enough. James 2:15 tells us that if someone is in need of food and clothing, and we tell them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not provide what they need, it is worthless. A sick person isn't comforted by an intended visit, and the loneliness of a shut-in isn't lessened by our good intentions to call. Good intentions are nice to have and may add meaning to a good deed, but intentions are often overrated. The bottom line is what we do - not how we feel.

While preparing to write this *d'rash*, one of my commentaries pointed out that the first 2 words of chapter 8 - *kol ha-mitzvah* - are usually translated as "every commandment" as in "you shall faithfully observe every commandment which I command you today." The NIV translation is, "Be careful to follow every command." The New King James version also says, "Every commandment. . ." However, another translation of *kol ha-mitzvah* is "the entire commandment." In this instance, the Torah does not tell us that we are to observe all of the commandments - that would be *kol ha-mitzvot* (the plural form of *mitzvah*). But when the Torah tells us to observe the entire commandment, what does this mean? Jewish tradition tells us that if you begin to do a good deed, but do not finish it, it doesn't count. In fact, if someone comes in after you and finishes the mitzvah, they get credit as if they had done it all by themselves. So if you are going to begin a good deed, complete it, for it is only credited to the one who completes it.

When the Israelites were first given the Torah at Sinai, they had good intentions for sure when they said that they would obey. In Joshua 24:24, the Israelites stated, "We will serve the Lord our God and obey Him." Well, they did for a while and things were great. Later on, they stopped obeying, and it got them a 400 year vacation in Babylon. Jewish tradition teaches that HaShem only enters the heart that will let Him in. It is our willingness to listen and obey that is a way to let holiness play a part in our lives. Doing a mitzvah is one way of obeying, and this is pleasing to HaShem and makes it possible for Him to enter our lives. So, when you have the opportunity to do a good deed, see it through. When you have a chance to do a mitzvah, stay the course. You may be surprised at the rich rewards you will reap.

Focus: Finish the job

Hebrew reading: Deut 8:1

English reading: Deut 8:1-3

Haftarah reading: Isaiah 51:1-3

B"rit Chadasha: Hebrews 11:8-10