

Kings and Prophets 13-06-07a

This is Friday the 7th of June 2013. We are in our study of the kings and prophets and we have reached the reign of King Asa down in the south. He is going to have a series of counterparts up in the north during his long 41-year reign.

We'll begin looking at his time in Israel, picking up in 1 Kings 15. Let's take a moment as we begin this very interesting part of the history of the kingdom of Judah as well as that of Israel by going to the Lord in prayer. Father, we are thankful for the many ways that You care for us, watching over us, providing for our needs, protecting us, blessing us, challenging us in ways that brings forward the truth of Your Word so that we can apply it, so that we can bear the fruit of righteousness by faith, that we can grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and be equipped and prepared for service both in this life and in the ages to come.

We ask that as we study this portion of Your Word together tonight that God the Holy Spirit will superintend, that He will be our teacher and will make these things not only understandable but pertinent to us so that we will find grounds for application and for further thought and study in the days ahead. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

When I was a little boy going to Sunday school, we were always relieved to get to good King Asa. King Asa in the south. Who are his predecessors on the throne of Judah? Of course, in the United Monarchy, we like to begin with David since he begins the dynasty after the death of Saul and his sons.

Following that, of course, was Solomon, David's grandson Rehoboam, the not-so-smart, not-so-good-at-taking-advice king. The great-grandson then is Abijah or Abijam, and his whole career in 1 Kings occupies only eight verses at the first part of chapter 15. We saw that there was some additional information.

He seems to be relatively insignificant when you look at him in Kings, but if you go to Chronicles, there's quite a bit more. We saw his rather foolhardy attempt to reunite the kingdom by going up and challenging Jeroboam in 2 Chronicles 13. He took 400 elephs of picked men and drew up in battle against Jeroboam, and he stood up on Mount Zimmerayim in the hill country of Ephraim and made his big speech, and while he was pontificating about all of the benefits and all of the advantages and all of the reasons why God was going to bless him and bring the entire nation back under his purview, why half of Jeroboam's men sneak around behind him, and in the midst of his speech, he suddenly finds himself surrounded, and he's the mush in the middle of a hammer and anvil military situation.

So you would think, well, that's it for this blowhard, rather foolhardy king who didn't consult with God, didn't consult with the prophets, didn't bother to actually use the things that he cites as his advantages. He claims that God is on his side, claims that they've got the worship center, claims that they've got the legitimate priesthood. All of that is true, but he doesn't actually use

it.

He doesn't actually consult God, and his heart is not actually in worship of the true God. He's got the forms, he's got the accouterments, he's got the externals and the associations and the bravura to claim them as his own, but they aren't really in his heart and in his life, and as the king of Judah, he reflects and represents much of the nation. So he's now in dire straits.

He's literally between a rock and a hard place, and yet God chooses to deliver him. Why? Is God vindicating and honoring his course of action or his blustery words? No. There is still a large remnant of faithful, growing, progressing believers in Judah, and God is not going to allow them to be subjugated to Jeroboam and the practices and the ruling of law and might of the north.

This king survives in spite of himself because God is blessing that remnant of the population of Judah that he is designing to protect. This is another example of not drawing conclusions from a happy outcome in circumstances. We think, well, look, I followed this course of action, I set these priorities, I pursued these goals, and we say God has blessed it, look how I came out.

That is not the measure. Many times God blesses and God preserves and God allows something that we would call success in spite of us, in spite of what we've done, not because of it. I would submit, and I do so humbly and carefully, but you can look around at very large congregations, very large churches, very large organizations in the Christian world, whether they are denominations, whether they are local or larger entities that constitute believers and call themselves the people of God.

And the fact that good things happen in, among, and around them doesn't necessarily mean that they are theologically correct. It doesn't mean that their emphasis is correct. It doesn't mean that their teaching is correct.

It doesn't mean that the individual pastors are doing a good job. God does what God is going to do either with us or without us. And if He's doing it without us, we can hardly know.

There is a fascinating collection of presentations that you can now access online. They have recently been glommed onto by Netflix. And they are the TED Talks.

You may have seen some of these. You used to be able to find them other places online. But the TED Talks are short.

They're 15- to 20-minute presentations by experts in a field or someone who has done a particular study in a given area. And if you were to go to one of these annual TED conferences that they have, they rent a big arena, you go there and sit in the audience, and you see these things live with the magnum screen and so on, it costs \$7,500 to attend one of these in person. If you watch one online and you look out at the audience, every one of those people has paid \$7,500 to be there.

You can pay \$8 and join Netflix and see all of them. So I find them fascinating because many of them address areas in which I am interested. I saw one this week that addressed the notion of what is it that makes us happy? And scientific studies being done on the fact that you know how people say happiness is a choice? Scientifically speaking, it has been documented that happiness is a choice.

Fascinating TED Talk on that. These come under different categories. There are some that are jocular.

There are some that are in different fields of science. The ones that I'm looking at right now are called Mind Teasers. Head games is the category.

If you go on Netflix, TED Talks, Mind Games. Under that is the study on happiness. I recommend it.

Just remember what you know about happiness and then watch that presentation. You will be interested to see how science documents what God has been saying all along, especially when it comes to happiness where you are constrained versus where you are unconstrained, where you really don't have a choice. For example, someone who has been injured or someone who has had a severe and permanent setback in their life.

Their career is over. Their athletic future is over, whatever. Just watch that and think about what you know from the Word of God.

Another one that I saw, which is pertinent to our study of these kings of Judah and Israel, has to do with being right or being wrong. Honestly, it's not my favorite TED Talk. It's a really good one and I like the material.

I'm not as enchanted with the presenter. She does a good job at the beginning and then she kind of less so at the end. But the material is great.

And here's the point that she makes very effectively in her short talk. What does it, and she asks this question, what does it feel like to be wrong? And she actually asks some people in the audience. Her whole study, she starts out with an illustration of herself turning out to be wrong.

She asked somebody a question about something they were seeing and it turned out that she had completely misinterpreted what she was seeing. And when you find out that you've goofed, of course it's embarrassing, you get defensive and all of that. But she asked this question, what does it feel like to be wrong? And so people said, well, you know, it's embarrassing, I have thumbs down on that and so on.

And she said, well, let me rephrase the question. Because actually those answers aren't right. What does it feel like when you become aware that you're wrong? That's when you're embarrassed, when you get defensive.

Previous to becoming aware of it, you're just as wrong, but when you don't know it, it feels like what? It feels like being right. Being wrong feels exactly like being right. Until you find out that you're wrong, being wrong has no feeling to tell you that you're wrong.

Especially in the secular world. Thankfully, God has given us His Holy Spirit, which is a supernatural agent to let us know that we are in the wrong. This is the convicting ministry of the Spirit.

What does it mean when the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment? What does that mean? It is a divine voice whispering in the ears of our soul saying, you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong. Wake up, change your mind, you're wrong. But our native human equipment has no sensor for wrongness.

We don't know we're wrong. It feels just as good as being right. It isn't until something informs us.

So, back to King Abijah. When he goes marching up to the north, does he feel like he's wrong? Absolutely not. And it's easy for all of his yes-men cabinet to say, oh, great idea, king.

Yes, let's go. The generals, chance to sharpen the swords and go up there and be a professional and earn some ribbons. Absolutely, let's go up there.

God is on our side and it kind of feeds on itself. Ra, ra, yes, let's go. Everybody wants to march up to the north.

They are wrong. It is wrong. How would they have known it is wrong? How would you know? You can't wait until you feel wrong.

Where does the king go? Where does the nation go to consult on righteousness? That's why God put his presence in Jerusalem. That's why there is a temple. That's why there is a place to go before the Lord and make appeal.

That's why there are prophets. We're going to see Asa tonight talking to a prophet. He gets in a jam.

The prophet says, look, here's some word from the Lord. Now, is God going to give us the information about us being wrong if we're not interested? No. He will let us find out the hard way because it's much more memorable.

It's much more dramatic. Do you think Abijah with his heart would have been more impressed with a prophet coming by and saying, by the way, king, you're not supposed to go up north, or going up there, getting surrounded, nearly getting his helmet handed to him on a platter, and being miraculously delivered by the Lord, which is more memorable for him? Well, the latter, of course. When it comes to this observation, in the days of the kings of Israel and Judah, and when we look at what happened, and then we say, so what, in my life, and in my desire to live a

life that is pleasing to God and is fruitful and productive and progressive, spiritually speaking, what conclusion do we draw from this? You and I cannot depend on our own feelings to know if we're right or wrong any more than this king.

Being wrong feels exactly like being right. Feels the same. This is why you and I are not called to live a life based on emotions.

Emotions are fleeting. They are fickle. They are unpredictable.

Have you ever been watching a movie that isn't really a top drawer movie? The direction is a bit ham-fisted. The acting is a bit shallow. The writing isn't that great.

And they get to the big finish where the swelling music kicks in, and you're supposed to just almost have tears in your eyes, and you say, oh, isn't that great? But it's just not there. They keep getting the music grander and grander, and you're going, oh, come on. They put in the obligatory applause scene where you're supposed to be, yeah, and you're going, ah.

It doesn't happen. There's a real art to doing a movie in a way that really compels you to feel that way at the end about the protagonist. For me, the applause scene always kills it, and virtually every movie you watch has this applause scene at the end.

Here's the control room in NASA, and the Apollo 13 guys survive, and they come back, and one guy starts going, and pretty soon the whole place erupts in applause. The Luke Skywalker thing, way back, this began, the prototypical thing, at the end, he's standing there with the Wookiee, and the whole place erupts in applause. Watch for it every single time.

Why is this? Why is this? Because people in the dramatic arts, people who do stage and screen performances, do it for applause. And when they are standing on stage at the end of a performance, and a whole room full of people is applauding, they feel great. Listen to any musician that spends a lot of time on the road, and they will talk about the difference between a warm audience, and they have rapport, and the energy is going back and forth, and all of this.

That's a feeling. In art, the feeling is fine. Feel good.

Go watch a feel-good movie. The best feel-good movie since Kramer vs. Kramer, or whatever it was.

I don't know what a feel-good movie is, because I don't watch them, but I assume they are out there since Born Free. Leo the cross-eyed lion. Born Free.

The whole, oh, it feels good. Or there was that thing with Shirley MacLaine. It was some kind of a heart thing.

I don't remember it. Fried Onions, Fried Green. There are a lot of these feel-good movies.

And somebody will watch them and say, oh, that made me feel good. So then the next one will

come out and say, this is the best movie since the last feel-good movie. Feelings are deceptive.

Feelings can be counterfeited. Why is it you can be watching a movie and have these emotions stirring you and moving you and taking you to the heights and the depths? That to me is kind of dangerous. Why should I be sitting there looking at various pictures scrolling by and suddenly I feel bad or suddenly I feel good? What changed? I'm sitting in a seat with half a thing of popcorn.

Why are my emotions being tugged hither and yon? Because they can. Things that are not real can tug your emotions hither and yon. And there are people who live for that, who love that.

Yes, take me on an emotional roller coaster. Reality TV. People get engrossed in the lives of other people and have a vicarious up and down.

They have a vicarious feud. They have a vicarious, look what I found that was cheap and I got a great bargain. Look at what I found that I was looking for.

Look at these weird people. I'm glad I'm not in that family. It's emotions, whipping you this way and that way.

Catching a catfish with your bare hands or driving trucks with big tires or whatever it might be. The shopping channel. People go there and buy stuff they didn't want with money they don't have because there's an emotional surge when they say, I got in just before it closed.

They only had 25 left and I got it just before it went to zero. Emotions. Think about this now.

This is what we are being taught in this book. Don't go on the way you feel because you feel irrespective of whether you're right or wrong. Where is rightness and wrongness determined? How do we get that information? Being right or being wrong is information and it doesn't come through our emotional apparatus.

It comes by consulting the standard. As many of you know, I've got a new hobby where I'm playing around with making bullets. It's very gratifying.

It's completely other. It's like the Star Trek guys. It's like nothing we've ever seen before.

You don't need a computer. You don't have to look at a screen. But it does kind of hark back to my artillery days and I just think it's kind of like making your own ammunition.

I just like it. I like the smell of gunpowder. I like the roar of grease paint and the smell of the crowd.

I like the whole episode. But when I look at a powder charge that's going to go inside the brass, when I look at a lead bullet that I'm going to seat, when I look at a primer that I'm going to put in there to assemble this piece of ammunition, I don't say get a scoop of gunpowder and start pouring until it feels right. I don't get a bullet and say, that bullet appeals to me.

I'll use this one. I've got a digital micrometer. I've got a digital scale sensitive to thousandths of a gram to make sure that the powder is exactly what it ought to be.

I have an absolute reference. Does this make sense? I have an absolute standard. It's objective.

The micrometer reads the same if I feel good or if I feel bad. The scale reads the same if I'm happy or if I'm depressed. I know that I have got 12 grains of Alliant Red Dot to put into this shell regardless of circumstances, regardless of feelings, regardless of what somebody else thinks or what I think.

It isn't subjective at all. It is objective reality. I have an absolute to which I refer to make sure that I don't hurt myself or others by making dangerous ammunition.

If you start getting emotional and forget what you're doing and double load your ammunition, that's dangerous. You can have a weapon blow up in your hand or blow up in your face. It's not something to appeal to emotion in the process of doing it.

Same thing with our lives before God. If you want to know the way that is right, don't go for the way that seemeth right. There is a way that seemeth right to a man.

The ends thereof are the ways of death. If you're leaning over a pot of hot lead and you're wearing long clothes because you don't want any of it to spatter on you and it's a hot afternoon and you're in the sun in your backyard and you're leaning over the pot, you do not want a large drop of sweat to fall off of your brow into the pot of lead. This will create an instant volcano of hot lead.

One drop of water will instantly go to superheated steam because the water goes to the bottom of the lead. The lead is blown out of the pot in all directions, spattering 700-degree molten metal over everything in its path. It takes concentration.

It takes knowledge. Feelings don't enter into it other than a healthy fear of screwing up. This is objective fact.

When you know this, you are careful. When you know this, you don't let anything wet. You don't throw a wet wheel weight into your pot.

This is factual, hard-edged reality. It's the same in our spiritual life. Don't think that you're on the outs with God because you're having a bad set of emotions.

Don't think that you're on a spiritual peak because you're having a wonderful set of emotions. Emotions are wonderful to enjoy. They are great in their place.

They are responses to inputs in our brain, and those inputs can be real or they can be imaginary. But our happiness is based on what we choose and how we view our choices, the confidence we have in our choices, the way we choose to look at our choices. And it's based on objective facts.

And the harder-edged those facts are, the more substantial our happiness is. The kings of Judah, the kings of Israel, had access to the God of Israel. Those nations still possess a covenant relationship with the Creator God of the universe.

There are priests and prophets available to present questions to God, to provide answers from God in the days before there is a canon, before there is much more than just the written law of Moses. God has provided communication. So my question for us tonight is this.

Has God provided communication similarly for us? Is there a way that we can approach God with our concerns, with our questions, with our uncertainties, with our challenges, with our problems, with our appreciations and with our blessings and with our hopes and our aspirations and our concerns for each other? Is there any way that we can do that? And is there a way for God to respond directly to us? And are we being just as foolish as the kings of Israel and Judah in operating oblivious to that line of communication with the God of our covenant, our new covenant, the covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ? It's easy to do because it feels fine. Being wrong feels exactly like being right. Not until you have information from another direction that you are in fact wrong does the feeling change.

We have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have the presence and the power of God available to us 24-7. We have the full-orbed, deep revelation of God in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the pages of Scripture, in the power of God's Word.

It's all available to us. What excuse do we have for operating wrong? What excuse do we have for operating on feelings when we have been given so much? From those to whom much is given, much is expected. Don't become complacent.

Don't become distracted. Don't become insensate to the realities that God has given us access to through these avenues, the presence and power of His Word and His Holy Spirit. This is how we cannot follow in the footsteps of these kings.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see that there is a king. After a series of not-so-hot kings, we get the chance to see a guy pretty much do it right.

And it's a relief. Remember when we were going through Ezekiel and there was this chapter after chapter after chapter, going through Isaiah, chapter after chapter after chapter of dismality and failure and rebuke. And every time you come to a little island, an oasis of positive expression from God, it was just such a relief.

You embraced it. It was an oasis in the desert. Well, King Asa.

And when we find these, we want to really drink deep and load up the camel skins with the cool water because there aren't very many of these moments. But this is one coming up when we come back from the break.