

Kings and Prophets 13-06-28a

This is Friday, the 28th of June, 2013. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets. We resume tonight in 2 Chronicles chapter 17 with the reign of Jehoshaphat.

We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time of fellowship and study to the Lord Jesus and to our desire to grow and be fruitful in God's plan. Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together in fellowship in the study of your Word, receiving the ministry of your Holy Spirit, strengthening ourselves in the truth of your Word, preparing ourselves and equipping ourselves by your grace for every good work. We pray that as we look at this passage of Scripture together that we each will find in it things that are helpful, things that are meaningful and will enable us to abide in the Lord Jesus and bear fruit unto righteousness so that we can reflect your glory now and in the ages to come.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. We have been tracing with some emphasis on the Southern Kingdom. I like the Southern Kingdom because it's more uplifting after slogging through Ezekiel and seeing chapter after chapter of depressing material.

I'm not happy about going through an unrelieved, bleak landscape. So I've intentionally leaned a little bit toward looking at Chronicles and at the record of the Southern Kingdom because although it's not without difficulties and it's not without its bad kings, it's certainly better prospects down there than it is up north. We will be moving to look at the succession, rather brief and quick succession of kings during the reign of Asa and Jehoshaphat in the near future, but we're going to pick up tonight in 2 Chronicles chapter 17 to look at good king Jehoshaphat.

You'll remember that week before last, when we last studied, we saw the latter part and the end of the reign of King Asa, who rested with his fathers after having become diseased in his feet. It was a severe malady, yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord but the physicians. And just a quick note on this, I think the older we all get, the more we realize how important it is to strive for the biblical, divine principle of balance.

There are people who come to this passage and some others in the scriptures and say we should go to faith healers or any time we get sick we should simply just pray. His mistake was relying on doctors and not going to the Lord. Well, that's true, but that doesn't mean going to the physicians is a bad idea.

I think most of us have got the God-given common sense to realize that the medical profession in general and doctors and their expertise in particular are part of God's provision for us certainly in this day and time. And I was having a conversation with Elizabeth earlier today about, or maybe it was yesterday, the days kind of blend together, about how people will get a hold of a persuasion and just be dead set in it and not be teachable. And that one of the definitions of humility is teachability, the ability to listen and the willingness to learn, to have

flexibility and enough humility to be ready to change our minds if the facts call for it.

And absolutism, it is always right to do this, it is never right to do the other, is a dangerous kind of persuasion. There are in fact certain things about which the Bible teaches us to be inflexible. If someone challenges the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, if someone challenges the authority of God in the universe and His presence and His plan and purpose in history, we can certainly, absolutely reject and refute those arguments.

But in the realm of less obvious and certain things, we should have a healthy level of open-mindedness. And there is this human tendency to think, well, here's the thing that I have come to be persuaded is right, and so it's always right in every circumstance. For example, in the case Elizabeth and I were talking about, there are deaf people who are adamantly persuaded that if they in turn have a deaf child, that that child should be not aided in any way.

If the doctors say, you know, there's an operation we can perform to cure this deafness, they take offense. And they say, what do you mean cure? Are you saying that this is a deficit and a handicap? We need more people in the deaf community, and if our child is born deaf, we're going to leave them that way, and even though technology exists. And they just become very adamant and closed-minded.

There are people that say, well, one kind of sign language is better than another, and they practically come to blows over this. It's signed English versus American Sign Language or whatever. Should a child get a cochlear implant if it will improve their hearing? You know, I believe Rush Limbaugh has got one of these.

And there's people that say, yes, you know, if you can enter the hearing world to whatever extent you should do so, others are just violently, blindly against it. And they won't listen to the other side. And there are deep schisms and divisions that are caused by this kind of persuadedness and false certitude about things over which you cannot, and this is my point, there are many things that you can't just make one-size-fits-all rules about.

You should never take medicines that mess with your mood. There are people that will say, any kind of a, any component of something that has an antidepressant in it, that's absolutely wrong to do. Somebody else will say, well, any medicine that's got alcohol in it, absolutely wrong to take.

You know, there are teetotalers, Jesus made Kool-Aid out of the water pots and served Kool-Aid in the upper room, and he never made any sort of alcoholic beverage, and they're just adamant about this. And they won't touch any medicine, you know, huge numbers of medicines have alcohol as a base or have something that alters you in some way. Maybe it makes you sleepy.

Maybe it's super strong. Maybe it's got codeine. Maybe it's got morphine.

And people just make these rules. There is, this is my suggestion to you, there are many things for which there is not a hard and fast rule where you can say it is always wrong or it is always

right. In most of our life, the answer is, it depends.

It depends. Should a child be put up for adoption? Well, it depends. What are the circumstances? Can you just flat out say adopting is always right or adopting is always wrong? Should a single parent adopt? Can you just say, well, that's always wrong.

No single parent should adopt. There should always be two parents in the home. There's people that just are violently committed to that viewpoint.

I'm not. I look at the situation where a child is either going to stay in the orphanage year after year after year, and you remember that I worked with Buckner and their orphan's home and the whole organization there for over six years. Do you want to leave a child in an orphanage environment? If there is somebody who is able, both financially, time-wise, commitment-wise, loving care-wise, to bring a child into their home and nurture them, they're a believer, they're going to bring them up and give them opportunities for faith and for growth, are you going to have some stick-in-the-mud rule and say, well, I just think it ought to be? It depends.

Many, many things in life, it depends. So my encouragement is, as sort of an opening salvo here, be careful about inflexible statements. Be careful about dogmatic assertions and dogmatic positions.

When it comes to me, when it comes to the things over which I have control, I'm responsible, I've been given authority, my family, my household, I can be dogmatic before the Lord, and I will answer for my policies and my decisions and my whatever level of dogma I implement under my own roof, in my own life. I can make a decision for myself if I choose never to take a medicine that's got alcohol in it, if I choose to drink or not to drink, or to take this medicine or not take that medicine, for whatever reason, that's ultimately between me and the Lord, and that's fine. We have a granted measure of autonomy and authority over ourselves before the Lord, and we're accountable for the way we exercise it.

It is a different thing to start making broad statements about other people and say, Well, because I believe that it's a bad thing, I intend to impose this standard on everybody else. Some things you can do it. Is murder always wrong? Well, I can't think of any case where it's right.

The Bible says, Thou shalt not murder. That seems pretty clear. There are people who are committed to tithing, and I say, God bless them.

If they're convinced in their own mind that 10 percent, how do you divvy it up? Is it by the month? Is it by the year? Is it before or after taxes? That's up to the individual. Whatever you choose in terms of stewardship is between us and the Lord. I would never, and I have never, we've never had a Bible class or a sermon on giving here, and we never will.

It's very clear in Scripture. As a man purposes in his own heart, so let him give. Not as I try to invent a purpose for your heart, not as I try to pressure, not as I paint the picture of need or whatever.

As each one purposes in his own heart, so let him give. Not grudgingly, not out of necessity, not under pressure. God loves a cheerful giver, something that comes from inside and is expressed out.

There are many things in life that's just an example of how it should be. We want to be reserved when it comes to pushing what we think is right beyond the place where we have knowledge. Sometimes we don't have all the facts, and we think, well, that's just wrong, that's just wrong, that's just wrong.

Then later on, we find out a bunch of things we didn't know, and we say, oh, guess what, I don't think that was as wrong as I thought it was. So my encouragement, this is more and more a part of our environment. The secular humanist, materialist, socialist society that is increasingly expressing itself in law and in American life tries to press one viewpoint on everybody else and to force it.

If they decide that perverted people are acceptable, then they will hunt me down and persecute me just for thinking otherwise, not for acting otherwise, just for thinking otherwise, for expressing a point of view. We in this country let Nazis march in parades. Neo-Nazis can walk down the street and have a parade and wave a swastika flag.

We say, look, if you really seriously think that's a good idea, have your march. Say your say. March with your signs.

You stop short of damaging property or intimidating people. If you start spray painting synagogues or persecuting Jews, then you've crossed a line because your actions are now violating someone else's rights. But freedom of expression, freedom of thought, when did it become illegal to hold certain opinions? Under the Christian worldview, we let people have whatever opinion they want.

We restrict their actions. You can hate whoever you want. You can like whoever you want.

You can avoid whoever you want. You can assemble with whoever you want. You have freedom of thought.

What you don't necessarily have is freedom of action. But now we have an environment where even freedom of thought is under threat. And believe me, it is satanically inspired.

And its ultimate goal, even though it's taking some intermediate objectives, its ultimate goal is to take your Christian faith and shove it out of sight and underground. That's what the objective is. Once the paradigm is established, once certain definitions are made, stand by.

Your faith will become illegal. Tenets of your faith, portions of the Bible will be illegal to voice, be illegal to publish, illegal to cover in any sort of a public venue. The thing itself may be edited away.

We just don't know what's going to occur. But the point of this is be aware. This is the night for technical difficulties.

Man, everything's shutting down on me. Be aware that we are accountable as priests to our high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him to God the Father. We have enough keeping our own house in order, and we don't want to follow suit with those who are overflowing their own borders and trying to tell other people how to think and how to act.

We have to find balance. There is a balance in being salt and light in society, and that shining like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation means we need freedom of thought and we need freedom of speech. It doesn't extend to freedom of action in the sense that we can go tackle people and handcuff them to the Ten Commandments or force our view.

But we can argue for our view. We can represent our view. We can live out our view.

We can show its benefits and its example of kindness and tolerance. But things are going in a very screwy direction, and you see it especially in the education system where there is an active brainwashing effort underway to force people to conform not just to actions but to thoughts. And you will be punished.

You will be penalized. You will be shoved out of sight and blacklisted and blackballed just for thinking a certain way. And that is a shift, and it's a serious one in this country.

So that's my little 10-minute get-it-off-my-chest time. Back to chapter 17 in 2 Chronicles. After Asa's death, Jehoshaphat, his son, reigned in his place and strengthened himself against Israel.

The northern confederacy of tribes is stronger than Judah, more numerous than Judah. It looked like it had territorial ambitions. So Jehoshaphat wisely puts money into the military budget, puts money into the defense budget, fortifies cities, continues what Asa began.

Remember when he took the building materials that Baasha had stockpiled in Ramah and used them to build walls and build up his defenses? Jehoshaphat continues and amplifies that policy. He placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa, his father, had taken. Point of application.

Jehoshaphat is a good king, and he sets a good example, and he is forward-looking. He analyzes the situation. He identifies a potential threat, and hear me now, he plans ahead and does something about it.

He doesn't wait for troops to march over his border and then say, oh, my goodness, we need some supplies, we need some fortifications. You and I have a responsibility to anticipate potential difficulties, potential challenges, and to prepare for them. We can do this prayerfully.

This is a great subject for prayer. Ask God to open our eyes and show us where preparation is needed, where we lack, where there's a deficit, where we're vulnerable, where we have perhaps

not exercised good stewardship or good planning. The younger you are, the more critical it is that we appeal on a regular basis to God.

It's not too early. No matter how young you are, the more you pray and ask God to guide your steps, to open your eyes, to show you the way you should walk, the better off we are. God will never disregard that prayer.

Think about it. If you genuinely seek God's will in your life, and you're genuinely asking Him, not because you just want to have a charmed life, but because you want to walk in a way that's pleasing to Him, you want to be in the center of His will, you want to be useful, you want to grow, you want to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, you want to be ready for the Lord's return, you want to be ready for the ages that are to come, if that's your heart's desire and you pray to God and ask Him to strengthen and guide and lead and enable perception, as David prayed, Lord, purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me.

I shall be whiter than snow. Show me my hidden faults, my secret faults. Try me.

See if there be any wicked way in me. If you pray that prayer, is there any conceivable way that God would not answer it? There is an absolute for you. Remember our verse, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, what will God do? He will hear from heaven.

He will heal. He will support. That is a prayer you can bank on.

100% of the time, God will answer that prayer in a positive way. Jehoshaphat perceives what the situation is and having perceived it, he takes action. He implements a plan.

He puts troops, garrisons. The Lord, verse 3, was with Jehoshaphat. Why? What does it say? I see people that must have dropped their sword on the way in.

You should have a Bible if you come to Bible class. We've got stacks of them in the case out there. The Lord was with Jehoshaphat.

Why? Because he walked in the ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments and not according to the acts of Israel. Therefore, the Lord established the kingdom in his hand and all Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat and he had riches and honor in abundance.

And his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord. Moreover, he removed the high places and wooden images from Judah. What was the one deficit that was noted early on in the reign of Asa? He did a whole bunch of things, but there's one thing he did not do.

High places. Jehoshaphat does everything his father did and goes a step further. Asa got rid of granny.

Jehoshaphat gets rid of the high places. His heart took delight in the ways of the Lord. Wouldn't

this be a wonderful epitaph? Everybody gathers to say goodbye to your corpse and plant it in the ground and they're reminiscing and they say, well, what can I remember about old so-and-so? Wouldn't it be great if one of the first thoughts that come to their mind is, there's somebody that took delight in the ways of the Lord.

They just really loved God. They loved His Word. It was an active part of their life.

It was obvious. It was manifest. Fruit of the Spirit on every branch.

That's how Jehoshaphat was. Verse 7, In the third year of his reign, he sent his leaders, Ben-Hael, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebediah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, the Levites, and with them Elishamah and Jehoram, the priests.

So what has he sent out here? We could do a lot with these names if I was going verse by verse. If you get a chance, check some of these names with your strong's and look at the meanings. Beautiful, beautiful names.

But categorically speaking, what kind of people has he sent out here? They are teachers. They are Levites. And they are priests.

What's the difference between a priest and a Levite? Well, all priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests. Right? Right? Make your head do the dog-in-the-back-window thing. All priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests.

So the Levites that are not priests, what do they do? They're the hewers of wood and the haulers of water. They're the guys that scrub and clean and support the operation of the temple. They manage.

They custodian. There's meals to be cooked. There's animals to be cared for.

There's altars to be serviced. There's all kinds of things that they do that are not a part of the priestly duties in the same way that the priests do things that these guys aren't designated to do. Now, who is intrinsically better? The Levites or the priests? Are the priests better than their fellow Levites? Are they qualitatively more valuable? It's just a different function.

What else do the Levites do? They're the choir. They sing. They bring the musical accompaniment.

They augment the worship of God in ways beyond what the priests do in terms of Levitical ritual and sacrifice. Jehoshaphat doesn't say, all right, everybody, you need to get with this worship of God. Everybody come to Jerusalem.

Come to the temple, and let's get this worship of God underway. He takes it to the people. This is like one of the earliest missionary revival campaigns on record.

He sends these guys out. Levite might say, well, I believe I should stay here and serve in the temple. Priest might say, well, what about my course when it comes due? David set up the courses of the priests that serve at different times.

Well, these guys are off-duty. They're not at the time where they serve. And Jehoshaphat says, well, instead of hanging around waiting for your 23 courses to go by before you can serve, you go out.

You don't have to perform the rituals because you can't take the temple with you, but you can explain them. You can give people insight into the inner workings of the temple. You can explain the word of God.

Here's a teacher. Here's somebody that actually is involved in the mechanics of worship. Here's somebody that can teach you the songs, teach you the songs of the steps.

So when you do come to an assembly feast, you'll know what to sing. You'll know why we sing it. You'll know who wrote it, can tell you some of the backstories.

Some of the most interesting books are the stories behind the hymns that we have in the hymnal. And that's what these guys could do. They could say, you know, some of these songs that we sing, here's how it came about.

This is a psalm of David, and here's what I've learned from my great-great-grandpa down among the Levites. And exciting people's interest in the things of God, going out into the communities and teaching and stirring up and making the presence of God visible and manifest and interesting to people all over Judah. This was Jehoshaphat's idea.

What a great king. He cares enough about the people. He doesn't just give an edict and command them to come.

He takes the word of God and the worship of God out to the people, and those who are involved in its implementation are out there mingling, and it gets people excited. It gets them interested. It brings them things.

Some of these people are too elderly or too handicapped to make it to Jerusalem. So if you can't come to Jerusalem, I'll send a little bit of Jerusalem to you, the Levites, the priests, the teachers. These guys will later be called the scribes, the experts in the law, to answer people's questions, to invest in them.

And this is the king's plan. And notice these men are named. You know why they're named? Because they did a good job.

When people do a good job or a real bad job in Scripture, there's your name. They don't say, and behold, the disciples were Peter, James, John, Philip, Andrew, Simon the Less, James the Less, Simon the Zealot, and he who shall not be named who betrayed the Lord. You get the

names.

And so these men are mentioned. Look at verse 9. They taught in Judah. They had the book of the law of the Lord with them.

They took the Scriptures out so that people could hear the Word of God. Listen, if you get into a discussion with someone, if there's an issue, if there's a decision to be made or a question that is asked, you can do no better than bring out the book. Quote Scripture.

Logical arguments are fine. Reasoning and interpolation and interpretation are fine. But there is no more powerful argument than Scripture itself.

Just quote the book. That's what God the Holy Spirit uses to crack the hardest rocks in the hardest hearts. Anybody that's got a glimmer, that's got the tiniest amount of interest in the things of God, it is the Word of God that is alive and powerful, that is sharp, that is able to pierce and divide asunder, that is the hammer breaking the rocks in pieces, that is the fire that consumes the chaff and reveals the essential truths of God and of life.

Don't shortchange the Word of God. Quote it. You've memorized it.

You know dozens and dozens and dozens of verses. We've memorized them together. Use them.

They took the book of the law with them. They went out through all the cities of Judah and taught the people. Jehoshaphat is a genius king.

He knows what the foundation of a healthy nation is. Blessed is that people whose God is the Lord. And guess what happened.

Look at verse 10. The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. It's a combination approach.

He's wisely fortified and strengthened his defenses and he has wisely fortified and strengthened his people spiritually. That's an unbeatable combination. Common sense and spiritual vitality.

You can't go wrong with that. What a great king. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll pick up in chapter 17, verse 11.