

Kings and Prophets 14-06-13a

This is Friday, the 13th of June, 2014. We're continuing our study of kings and prophets. We pick up this evening in 2 Kings 8, verse 16.

We'll take just a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, then we will begin. Father, thank you for your preserving grace, your compassion, your faithfulness toward us expressed in so many ways, all of which we could in no way deserve or merit or expect from you except through the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know that in Him we are the beneficiaries of so many wonderful things.

We thank you for those. We thank you for the chance to gather and to be an encouragement to one another, to look together into the truth of your Word and find those things that are meaningful to us in the situations we face and the decisions that we make. We pray that as we look at this record of events from long ago, that God the Holy Spirit will show us why it is here, what it means to us, and how its living truth can enable us and empower us for every good work.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Turn with me just quickly.

Keep your finger in 2 Kings 8, but turn to Luke 4. Luke 4. There is a principle that the Lord Jesus mentions fairly early in His ministry that directly impinges on our study. Luke 4. Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth where He was brought up. Why is the location of what follows significant? Because this is a place where there's a rough crowd.

It's people know Him and they don't necessarily look kindly on someone that they believe may be sort of putting on airs or who seems to have gone beyond what they should. And so as Jesus in Nazareth goes to the synagogue as is His custom on the Sabbath day, He stands up to read. And it's interesting that without any sort of rabbinical training, Jesus knows how to read.

Where did He learn to read? Did God just bestow that on Him from heaven? I don't think so. But His cousin, John, is connected to the priestly families. His mother, Mary, is evidently connected to the priestly families.

And evidently the Lord Jesus availed Himself of the opportunity or perhaps His parents ensured that He went over and got the training to learn how to read. Literacy was not common in the working class in the ancient Near East. But it's not without significance that Jesus stood up and read this scroll.

This was typically a privilege reserved for temple-trained, synagogue-trained priests and scribes who were sort of a special class. And you could imagine that this was part of what fueled the jealousy, animosity, resentment in the crowd that Jesus had this among other attainments that weren't common in the population of His town. And they say, what's He doing going to the front, taking the scroll and reading? He's the carpenter's servant.

I don't know if you've ever met some sort of a journeyman, tradesman, blue collar type, whatever Joseph did. There's some debate about whether he was a carpenter or a blacksmith or a worker in leather or whatever. The word is a bit unclear.

But whatever it was, those people didn't have kids who knew how to read and would stand and lead a synagogue worship service the way Jesus was doing. So He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Think about that content. We know it's a quote.

Jesus was reading it out of the Isaiah scroll. But think about just the overall meaning. We don't have to translate it.

We don't have to parse it. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach the gospel to who? To the kings, to the leaders, to the temple over the people site committee, to the Sanhedrin, to the court of Herod, to the Romans.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach to the poor. It's almost an oxymoron that God's Holy Spirit would be poured out on someone in a special and unique way and with this profound enablement instead of going to anyone in power, His mission is to preach to the poor. Why? What do you want to preach to the poor for? Are they going to make policy in the nation? Are they going to overthrow the Romans? Are you going to create a grassroots rebellion? Why would you preach to the poor? Jesus closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

In the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. It's an interesting passage to select out of the entire 66 chapters of the Isaiah scroll, that's what He chose to read. He stood up, He read it and He sat down.

This, by the way, was the posture for teaching just like I'm doing right now. Jesus didn't have a laptop, but sitting was the posture for extended teaching. And so He sat down and so they are expecting something by way of teaching based on this passage.

So He began to say to them, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. That's a shocker. This scripture is fulfilled as you sit here listening.

This Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, capital M, I, Jesus, that just read this to you, because God has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal, to proclaim liberty and recovery of sight, to set at liberty the oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. So all bore witness to Him and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

That's just the summary, the little red ink there, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. He spoke for 30, 45 minutes, an hour, that was His theme. When He finished, it says, all bore witness to Him.

This is when the service was over. Everyone began talking among themselves. They didn't bear witness while He was talking.

It's just a summary. They marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth and they said, is this not Joseph's son? They're confronted with the uniqueness of what they have just witnessed and the unexpected qualities that emerged in Jesus' words and His teaching and they're confronted by it. They've got to do something with it.

It's a truth. It's a reality that they have observed. They've heard it and they've seen it.

So how do they process it? This is where you are in verse 22, is people are trying to process the experience. That's how we say it now. That's how the trendy thing, we're going to process the experience.

How do I evaluate this? How do I explain it? What category do I put it in? What value do I assign to it? So they begin talking to each other. Each one in his own heart is conflicted. Left to themselves without being able to talk, they would just have to continue to wrestle and try to figure out, well, do I believe what He said? What do I do with what I've just seen? But they turn to each other, which is sometimes, depending on the crowd, a good thing or not so good.

So they said, is this not Joseph's son? And they're saying, he's a commoner. We know this guy. Where did all of this come from? He said to them, you will surely say this proverb to me, physician heal yourself.

In other words, you're no different than us. You're no better than us. If you're going to heal somebody, you have just as many problems as us.

So if you're going to start healing, well, start with yourself. Jesus says, this is what you're going to quote to me. Physician heal yourself.

Why would they quote this to him? Because they're going to impute to him the same weaknesses, frailties. They're going to judge him by their own hearts. And this is so common and it's something we want to watch for and not do.

Do not judge others by yourself, either positively or negatively. We're believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And sometimes we just would never suspect the depths to which someone can sink in their thinking and in their behavior because we judge them by what we would do in their place.

And it's just unthinkable. Well, that's dangerous. It's equally dangerous if we're in a low place and we have a lot of personal problems to assume that because we have a problem, everyone has a problem.

It used to annoy me to no end and it still does people in subsequent generations to be told, well, I know all of you have already had sex. I know all of you have already slept around. I know all of you have done this.

All of you have tried dope. All of you have done, you know, they just broad brush because this is what they did when they were younger. And it pains them to believe that somebody could take any kind of a higher road than they did or succeed where they failed or endure and persist when they didn't.

And so they must judge others by themselves. And in either the negative or the positive sense, it is dangerous. Jesus says, you are sitting out there judging me by yourselves, assuming that because I come from your town, I'm exactly like you.

Physician, heal yourself. Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in your country. If you're better than us, prove it.

We've heard these unfounded rumors that you did miracles down in Capernaum, but we're not going to believe it until we see it ourselves because we know you. We know better. You're just, you're one of us.

That's the implication. So he says, assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a great famine throughout all the land.

But to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath in the region of Sidon to a woman who was a widow. The Sidonians are Gentiles. This is outside the land.

There were many widows in the days of Elijah, but he was sent to an obscure woman up in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. Now what her particular antecedents are, we don't know, but she was living in a Gentile area. Sidon has not been a part of Israel proper.

Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath and rose up and thrust him out of the city, led him to the brow of the hill and you remember the upshot of this. They are exposed in their hypocrisy and their cheapness of their thought, the shallowness of their evaluation.

Jesus exposes it and this just angers them to the point of murder. They would have murdered him if they could. Well this impinges on our study in 2 Kings 8 to which we can now return because the chapter begins with the story of the widow.

This is the widow that Elisha dealt with a few years after Elijah's Sidonian widow, but the principle is the same. And as we continue starting at verse 16 of chapter 8, we are going to see Elisha dealing with kings and matters of state and national destinies where a few verses earlier he is dealing with one individual woman and her son and her well-being during the time of the

drought. She is warned ahead of time and then when she returns her goods are restored to her fully intact with interest.

She loses nothing during the famine. And it is not without significance that these two things are juxtaposed and sometimes even more or as much as the content of the scripture we look at is its arrangement and its format. And there is a powerful reminder to us that God knows where every leper is in Israel.

God knows where every leper is in Syria. God knows where every widow is in Israel. God knows where every widow is in Sidon.

And even as the events of nations and kings and the powerful and the rich and the affluent, even as armies engage and great events of history ebb and flow, God is equally aware of individuals and pays particular attention to those who are paying attention to Him. And in scripture the poor get equal time and equal weight with the rich and the powerful. We are tempted to think, looking as we do at a digitally connected globe and we are aware of the size of the earth and the vast swarms of people that team upon its surface, and we are tempted to think, well, one person more or less in the plan and purpose of God just isn't going to be that significant.

Don't use that excuse. We can't let ourselves off the hook with that facile sort of rationalization. God is the God of the microscopic just as much as He is of the macroscopic, and He is intimately aware and is intimately involved in your life and my life just as this widow.

And not only is that a sobering responsibility, but it is also a tremendous comfort and encouragement that our Heavenly Father is aware of us in great detail, in infinite detail. He knew us before we were formed in our mother's wombs. He is aware of every second of our existence, every cause, every condition, every succession, every relation that forms a part of our life.

There is nothing too small for God to be aware of. There is no prayer of ours that He doesn't hear. There is no thought of ours that He does not evaluate.

And this creates for us both responsibility and opportunity. Opportunity is what I want to focus on. This is opportunity.

We think, well, if things were different, maybe I could have done great things for God. Maybe I could have gone on if I was more faithful. Nonsense.

Right here, right now, in the course of our lives and many of you, I hope all of us, have already been aware of this and are seeking to exploit and maximize this potential and this opportunity. That's why you're in Bible class now. Some Bible classes are really stimulating and exciting and others are more of a coverage of the material that doesn't necessarily have the surprising and exuberant qualities of investigation that we have, but we dedicate ourselves to it.

Why? Because we know that God is present, God is interested, and God expects us to lay hold of this opportunity and do something with it. So there's such an interesting shift. When you go from verse 15 to verse 16 in this chapter, Jesus came to preach the gospel to the poor.

This woman, this man, this woman is poor, not so much in the economic sense as in the significance sense. How many women were there in and around Israel in her generation and in every generation since? What marks this woman out as special? She's got two different parts of the book of Kings dedicated to her life story. There's an infinitude of people that could have been in here.

She is in here. Why? Not only because she herself was laying hold of the potential when she saw the man of God and recognized that there was an opportunity to be an active part of the forward progress of God's plan and purpose in her nation, but she trusted God. She was obedient.

When the prophet said, leave, there's going to be a drought, she didn't ask questions. She didn't say when. She didn't say how far should I go? She said, that's good enough for me.

And she left. She entrusted her future and her fate to God and God honored her faith with provision and blessing, preservation. And she becomes a metaphor, a symbol of the nation of Israel itself.

This one nameless woman stands in scripture representing Israel and the son of promise who died and lived again, providing hope and a future, removed to a far country for a time, restored and given back possession of her land with all of the prosperity thereunto pertaining. It's extraordinary. But this is why Jesus preached the gospel to the poor because it is not where you start, it is where you finish.

So I was sort of joking with a guy on an online board who I've done a little bit of genealogy and this guy did some genealogy and he traced his line back. It was very difficult though because his last name is Jones. I would hate to do any kind of genealogical research with that name but he tried it and he didn't get very far with that patronymic.

But some of his other lines, you go back a few generations and you've got 8, 16, 32 names to play with. So one of those he traced back and he traced it way back. He traced it all the way back a thousand years and found that he is descended from St. Margaret.

Well, it's 28 generations back and at that distance, if you do the math, you've got a couple of billion, a couple of billion equally related people. Not hundreds, not thousands, billions. And so his tongue in cheek question was, well, now that I've found out that I'm related to a saint, I thought I might... He's an atheist.

He's actually a lapsed Methodist. He's from across the pond. But I think in his heart of hearts, he kind of thinks, well, I haven't totally thrown that over.

Anyway, tongue in cheek, he said, now that I know I'm related to a saint, I thought even though I'm not an Episcopalian or a Catholic or anything, I'd float a prayer up there and see what happens because I've kind of gotten in. And at this distance, 28 generations back, he said, well, what should I ask for? And I said in reply, equally tongue in cheek, I'm not sure she's going to be able to find you in her list of Facebook friends given the number of descendants that are likely to be making an appeal. But it kind of put in my mind that we tend to think in the vast swarms, God is not Saint Margaret.

God really does have the ability to, for our understanding, localize himself to be in front of us. The Lord Jesus is God. And he said, I'm standing at the door and knocking, and if anyone will open the door, I will come in and sit down with him and share a meal.

That's the level of intimacy. That's the level of knowledge. That's the level of fellowship.

And so when we turn this corner here between verse 15 and verse 16, just remember, we're going from one lady. I think at this point she's a widow. There's others that say, well, it's not mentioned.

Maybe the guy's just old. Look, she is down there signing up to get the land back. So in my mind, the guy is gone.

So I'm calling her a widow. She's a functional widow, just like right now I'm a geographical bachelor. My family's all elsewhere, and I'm doing all the housework and pet care.

So for all intents and purposes, at this point, she's a widow. But we're moving in one verse from this seemingly insignificant lady, one lady with a son, to kings. We're going to king level.

And in God's mind, the importance doesn't change at all. Doesn't change at all. I heard of someone who raised an issue with a guy who's a pastor, and the pastor saw the value of this particular thing and said, oh, well, I'm really impressed with this, and I'll certainly take it to heart.

Well, this guy is Billy Graham's pastor. So when he returned home and was talking to Billy Graham, he shared this issue with Billy Graham. And Billy Graham said, I'm impressed with it, too.

Let's kneel down right now, and we're going to pray for that issue and everybody involved with it. And you think, wow, Billy Graham has been praying for this particular thing. We have to get out of that mindset.

We have to get out of that mindset. In God's mind, you're already being prayed for by Billy Graham. You're being interceded for by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself seated at the right hand of the Father.

That's all the influence we need. If the Lord Jesus has come through our door and has sat down

at our table and is conversing with us and sharing a meal with us, you don't need saints. You don't need famous evangelists.

You don't need a really good pastor. You're in God's family, and He knows us as intimately as He knows this woman. And I cannot emphasize too much how important our status of relationship is.

Our Christianity is not ritual. It isn't a step program. It isn't a procedure or a routine.

It's not attending enough Bible classes or taking enough notes or hearing enough tapes. It is conversation with the living God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is so little understood and so undervalued, I would estimate that there is a tiny, tiny fraction of living believers, maybe just a few thousand planet-wide, that actually get this, that actually understand it.

Those are the hearts that God is looking for. You are the person that God craves fellowship with, wants to bless, wants to encourage, wants to train, even through adversity, wants to find who understands enough to endure through suffering to learn timeless, eternal lessons that will leverage and parlay into eternal service in the ages and the kingdoms to come. You're part of a large body and a large family of Christ.

But within that body and within that family, there are so few who understand what we have just discussed. And you are those who do understand it. Don't fumble the ball.

Don't drop the torch. This is the chance to be pleasing to God, to be genuinely valuable in implementing His plan and His purpose that transcends human circumstances. It doesn't matter if you're just doing chores.

It doesn't matter if you're just doing the same job that you do day after day after day after day. That's the human view. It is the thought life and the prayer life and the spiritual priorities that you set as you do those things.

Look at this widow. What's her claim to fame? Was she running a big ranch and employing a bunch of people? Did she spark a revival in the land? Did her son go on to found a great ministry in Israel? What were the human circumstance effects of this woman in her day and in her neighborhood and in her surroundings? Nothing is recorded of that. Why is she in the Bible? Not for those things.

Not for a circumstantial impact. It's because her heart for God reflected in her treatment, her seizing this one opportunity to be a blessing and a benefit to the prophet. She's in the eternal pages of the Word of God.

Would she have conceived of such a thing? She went to her grave never knowing that you and I, 26, 2700 years later, would be talking about her and talking about her at length, her and her son and the episodes of her life. She had no inkling. She would have probably had a harder

time believing that than she did believing the promise of God, that she would somehow be an example and be used by God generation after generation for hundreds, yea, thousands of years to be a blessing to countless believers that she never met.

How could she fathom it? Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, hasn't entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him. She loved God. This is the result.

And one verse later, God is now dealing with a king. Same level, same importance, same value in the plan and purpose of God. That's where you and I stand and it's something worth remembering, something to reflect on, something that holds us accountable, reminds us of our responsibility and also ought to fire us up and inspire us with the opportunity that it is.

How many believers today understand this opportunity enough to lay hold of it? We are blessed to see it here and to have it put before us in such a meaningful way. We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up with our formal study in 2 Kings 8.