

Kings and Prophets 14-10-30a

This is Thursday, the 30th of October, 2014. We resume our study in Kings and Prophets after a couple of weeks vacation, just doing nothing, being off, just to be off. But we'll be resuming in 2 Chronicles chapter 24 parallel to 2 Kings chapter 12.

We're looking at the reign and the end of the reign of, quote, Good King Joash. Let's take a moment as we begin our time of fellowship to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, what a privilege it is for us to spend this time together to set aside the things that normally occupy our attention and our energy to refresh ourselves at the oasis of living water that is found in Your Word through the ministry of Your Spirit because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ all under the superintendence of Your plan and purpose.

We are so grateful to be called by Your name, to be in Christ, to be enabled and empowered by Your Spirit, to be guided and have our way illuminated by the Word. And we pray that as we spend this time looking at this portion of Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, help us to see not only historically and doctrinally what Your Word contains, but to find its pertinence and its application as we try to live the time that remains to us in this life in a way that pleases You. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified, that each one here will receive a blessing and be an avenue of blessing for all those who have assembled because they love You and love Your Word.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. Just by way of review, we have come to this very interesting time in the history of the divided kingdom after Ahab and Jezebel have been eliminated in the north, after Athaliah has been eliminated in the south. And we're looking particularly now at the kingdom of Judah and the successor to the short, but manifold evil time of Athaliah, we have Joash who was rescued as a baby, hidden away and then revealed as the rightful heir and successor to David's throne in Judah.

Jehoiada, the priest, accomplishes this feat of preservation and restoration and it is a fulfillment of God's promise that David would not lack a man to sit on the throne in Jerusalem. Because there is an alternate throne up north, God doesn't pay any special attention to that and a succession of ne'er-do-wells and nefarious non-Davidic kings occupy the throne in Samaria. But in the south, in Judah, despite some near tragic interruptions, there is a lineal descendant of David sitting on the throne and Joash is the latest.

There is a flexibility in names during this period as we have seen. Someone may be Joash or he may be Jehoash and so on. We've seen this flexibility.

We see it again in this episode of the eventual demise of this king at the hands of his servants. Their names and their father's names are in different forms in 2 Kings 12 and in 2 Chronicles 24. I mention that because we have here a very interesting point of contact with the Lord Jesus Christ and with the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

We saw last time, and this has been three weeks ago now, that in 2 Chronicles 24, beginning at verse 15, after the death of Jehoiada at the age of 130, Joash seems to have lost his operator, his puppeteer hand that gave him strength and direction. He could not remember a day where Jehoiada was not his mentor, really the brains of the operation and the de facto policy maker in Judah. When Jehoiada dies, it is as though Joash doesn't have an independent ability to exercise judgment, to establish direction, to depend upon his own personal spiritual motivation.

Now, why is that recorded in the Word of God? I would suggest that as a point of application, and I mentioned this last time, each of us has to examine himself to see if we are in the faith. It is much easier to look at other people and see if they are in the faith. I would rather look at you and see if you are in the faith than look at me and see how well I am doing, because I like to assume that I am doing great.

So I would rather peer over the end of my nose at others and make an evaluation. The problem with that is Jeremiah 17, verse 9, which as you will recall says, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It is a sobering thing, and I think all of us, especially once we get into our adult years, hopefully our very early adult years, realize that we need to look at our inner compass with caution and even with a bit of suspicion.

We can go along for some indefinite period of time relying on our conscience and what our conscience tells us. If I do a thing and I am not troubled, I'm not second guessing myself, I don't have misgivings, I don't have a sense of some sort of hollow negativity, then I assume I was right. And I wait until I feel that badness, that negative feedback in my soul, before I really start seriously questioning my moral compass, my judgment, my actions, my words, my thoughts, the intentions of my heart, my purposes.

If I feel pretty good and I'm upbeat, I don't feel convicted, then I don't really tend to give it much thought. And I think most of us are that way. What is very sobering, and I think sooner or later we have this experience, is we go through an episode, a period, a circumstance where all of the lights are green, everything seems okay, and at a subsequent point it is revealed that we were wrong, and perhaps egregiously wrong.

And it is at that point that we're drawn up short and we say, how did I not see that? How was I so blind? Well, here's how. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Who can understand it? Who can evaluate the heart and know whether it is a trustworthy guide to righteousness, to letting us know that we are about to head into a sinful direction or an evil pattern? This is why you are here right now listening to the mellifluous tones of my voice, because you recognize that we need an outside reference.

We need something to establish a foundation on which our hearts can rest, on which our conscience can be founded so that it knows what is right and what is wrong. There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. And what is happening now is for the lack of influence from the Word of God and from the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, people are, as it says in the Judges, or at the end of Joshua, every man does

what is right in his own eyes.

Well, how does that work? Every man did what was right in his own eyes. In my eyes, it's right. There is a very sort of scary development taking place in our culture, and it is the product of several generations raised independently of any biblical influence or any interest in the things of God.

They are taking the Ten Commandments out of public places. They are forbidding prayer. You are not allowed to mention God.

You can mention anything else except God. The result of this is that there is no fixed reference. Now they have ethics training, trying to get people to adopt some sort of fixed or generally accepted standard of what is right and what is wrong.

But you think about this. I posed this question, although I don't think I actually hit the trigger. But I wrote something to someone, and then I don't think I sent it.

Let's say, this is a little quick mental exercise, to get into the mind of Joash. We're looking at Joash, and we're looking at the disappearance of Jehoiada from his life. The priestly influence that has been there as long as he can remember, and then the man dies.

Imagine this situation. You are responsible for a small group of your family. You have children, parents, siblings.

You've got three or four people for which you are personally responsible. For whatever reason, they can't provide for themselves. They're depending on you.

You are, through some fluke of circumstances, the one to whom they must look for their security and their provision. Well, you don't have anything to provide. There's been a disaster.

There's been some freakish set of circumstances, and there's nothing to feed them. They are hungry. You've got nothing and no way to get anything for them.

Just down the road from you, I live. I have not been affected by these freakish circumstances. I have a well-stocked pantry.

I have plenty of provision for myself. I've got more than enough. I've got stuff for the future.

I've got it socked away. I've got some in my garage. I've got in my freezer.

I've got an abundance. I worked at a job. I saved my money.

I invested in this food. I've got it there. I'm feeding my family with it, but I've got more than enough.

But I don't know about your circumstance, and maybe I'm not inclined to be particularly charitable. So there you sit, faced with a starving family, knowing just a couple hundred feet

away, I sit with a superabundance of food. The idea crosses your mind, I could go take some of that surplus that he doesn't really need to survive.

My family is starving. Is it right or is it wrong to take it? And depending on the answer to that, why? If you think it's right to take it, why? If you think it's wrong to take it, why? I would submit to you that in this day and age, nobody can come up with a reason to not take it. When you divorce yourself from God and the things of God and what biblical integrity is and on whom we depend for our provision, why would I not go down and rob my neighbor when it isn't going to injure him, and failing to do so, my family could starve? This is the nature of human rationalization, human floating standards, because to me, in that situation, it is right.

Well, once you move that line away from thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's ox, nor his ass, nor his wife, or anything that is thy neighbor's. Once you move that line, there is no place to stop it. Instead of I need it because I fear that my family is going to starve, it can be I need it because I feel bad without it and I don't think you need it.

So I am judge and jury, and the sentence is you're going to lose that stuff and I'm going to get it. This is now the mentality when you see natural disasters, you see any suspension of the law, you see any excuse, somebody gets shot in some other part of town, now I have an excuse to loot, to riot, to destroy, I'm justified in my own mind. This is what happens when we do not have our own internal truth-based, and by truth I mean capital T truth, as in the Logos, as in the Lord Jesus Christ, as in the Word of God.

If we do not have that spiritual standard in us, built in us, through edification, through the building of that edifice of righteousness and of a righteous conscience before God, if we do not have that, you are in some area of that spectrum, the far end of which is I'll do whatever I feel like, I will do what is right in my own eyes. To me it's right. Conscience seared with a hot iron, as Paul says.

In this passage, Joash does not have an internal sense of what is right and wrong. He has had an external standard imposed on him all his life. Jehoiada, the priest, is the binding that keeps him from cracking apart.

We know that because when Jehoiada leaves, Joash, spiritually speaking, from the standpoint of righteousness, falls apart. So question number one for us is, do I personally have my own standard built and based in my soul on the Word of God, enabled and empowered and illuminated, energized by God's Holy Spirit? If we cannot confidently say that our norms and standards, our measuring stick of right and wrong, is biblical, and we will go to the mat for it, we will starve rather than break it. We will watch our family starve rather than break it.

If that is not true, the fate of Joash is going to be our fate. The legacy is going to be shared, and the disapproval of God is going to be the result. The Bible is replete with examples, but here's what's interesting.

Take a look now back in 2 Chronicles 24, beginning at verse 15. Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died. He was 130 years old when he died.

They buried him in the city of David among the kings. A little bit strange. This isn't the normal fate for priests, but he was sort of the de facto king, and that's where he ends up.

He had done good in Israel, both toward God and His house. Keep in mind, by the way, that the book of Chronicles is universally recognized as being the priestly historical record. The priests wrote Chronicles.

And in terms of viewpoint, yes, it is inspired by God's Holy Spirit. Yes, it is an accurate, infallible, inerrant part of the Word of God. But in the same way that you can detect Paul's personality and Paul's likes and dislikes when he writes a letter, you can detect Peter's personality and his likes and dislikes when you read the epistles of Peter.

You can see what James, the Lord's brother, was like when you read the epistle of James. And you can see what was near and dear to the priest's heart when they wrote the Chronicles. This is why in Chronicles it said, well, you know, we did eventually get the temple fixed up with the money that Joash collected.

Where in Kings it says no such thing. The priests, within the limits of inspiration and inerrancy, are going to put things in a favorable light for the priests. And it's just a fact.

It's so well documented that anybody who makes a comment about authorship will point this out. Chronicles is manifestly the record that was kept and copied and maintained and elaborated on by the priests. Kings, not so much.

So where there is overlap and where there is difference, you will see in Chronicles that it tends to be a little more heavily oriented toward Judah. Why? That's where the priests hang out. And it will be more favorable to the priests.

It won't be so quick to be judgmental and it will be a little more quick to be favorable. So we have that here. And Jehoiada is a good guy.

He's buried with the kings because he did a good job. Nothing wrong with that. But notice that's something that tends to be, this sort of perspective is going to be emphasized in Chronicles.

Now after the death of Jehoiada, verse 17, the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king and the king listened to them. The leaders of Judah. Who are the leaders of Judah? Well, when you think of leadership in Israel, how was that first structured? When they came out of Egypt and they had to start developing some leadership, what did they do? They came out with a system of elders and it was tribe-based.

How many tribes have you got in Judah? Two at most. Benjamin is already in the process of sort

of dissolving into and losing identity. But it's not like you've got 10 or 11 other tribes floating around down there.

It's basically Judah. So you don't just have one elder from the tribe of Judah. What do we have in terms of leaders in Judah? These are going to be the next level down.

Clans. Clans in Judah. And many times these are going to be the names by which people are known.

There is some speculation that even in the genealogies, especially the oldest genealogies that we have in the Bible, when it says so-and-so was the son of so-and-so, son of, or so-and-so begat so-and-so, is that you're going from most prominent clan leader to most prominent clan descendant and that there may be a series of generations in between. That's really not our topic tonight. But when it says the leaders of Judah, these are the civil leadership.

Not the priestly leadership. Not prophetic leadership. These are clan leaders.

They have areas of Judah for which they speak. We're from the hill country. We're from the Shephelah.

We're from near the Jordan. We're from the south. We're from the west.

Wherever they may be, they come in and they want to influence the king. There is a vacuum of influence with the death of Jehoiada. So these clan leaders who have... These are your congressmen coming in and making a case for their district, so to speak.

They bowed down to the king and the king listened to them. Well, they've got a variety of interests, some of them coordinated, some of them conflicting. Therefore, they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers and served wooden images and idols.

Notice it's images and idols, plural. They didn't go to Baal worship. That's right out, as they say.

Baal, that's been Ahab, Jezebel, Athaliah, boo on Baal. Baal is out. So where are we getting these images and idols, plural? Well, in the hills, this is what works.

In the plains, this is what works. In the sheep industry, this is what works. In the cattle industry, this is the God to whom we pray.

When we're trying to grow crops, this is the one to whom we pray. It's a local thing. And you don't want to mess with our local customs and traditions that have prevailed for all of a few decades now.

This is kind of like you can't cancel Kwanzaa. We just invented it 20, 30 years ago, but everybody celebrates it, so you can't cancel it now. You can't not have our new form of influence.

And so these local interests come in and they make their argument. Well, Joash, having no

north star to refer to anymore, says, Well, sure, that makes sense. Far be it from me to mess with your local gods and your local practices and your local customs and festivals.

Oh, you mean we'd have to cancel Halloween? No candy at the door? We'd have to cancel Christmas? No tree and no holly and ivy and berries and presents and candles and 12 days and all the rest of it? No sleighs and Santy Claus and Frosty and Rudolph? Oh, my goodness. Well, we can't have that. And so the weight of these arguments from local tradition sways the king.

He's got no center post. It makes sense to him that to avoid creating a bunch of hate and discontent, let these people continue. This is why the high places never got removed.

Right. Local high places never got eliminated. If you want to think about high places, think back to the days of Gideon.

So they served wooden images and idols and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass. Now, here's what I don't understand. See if you can help me out with this.

If you look back at the first part of Chapter 24, didn't we cover last time the whole program of restoring the temple? Went on for 23 years and not much happened. And the king harumphed around and said, why isn't it happening? We need to change the way we collect the money and the way we distribute it and the people who use it. And we're going to get this fixed.

And so they had the chest of Joash. They drilled a hole in the top and threw the money in. And by golly, we got the temple fixed up.

Right. So what's with all of this wooden idols and images and the wrath of God? In other words, how effective for the spiritual life of Judah was the physical restoration of the temple? How effective was it? Was the building of the building and the restoration of the accouterments and getting the golden spoons and the brass shovels and all the rest of it back in action? How good was that for the spiritual health and vitality of Judah? As soon as Jehoiada leaves the scene, there they look like Samaria. Right.

Now, keep your finger here and turn back a couple of pages to 2 Chronicles, Chapter 20. Just by way of recollection. Go back one more chapter to 19.

It's a short chapter. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. Jehu, the son of Hanani, the seer, went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you.

Nevertheless, good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land and have prepared your heart to seek God. You removed the wooden images from the land. He brooked the discontent of these local groups and local elders, local leaders, and removed them.

And he prepared his heart to seek the Lord. So, verse 4. Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba in the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers. He set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, Take heed in what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the Lord.

What standard is going to be applied for justice? Every local standard, every local God's whim, every local priest for a wooden image and an idol, you judge for the Lord. You're going to use the Mosaic legislation to determine right and wrong. You're going to use the Word of God to make your judgments.

Therefore let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes. This is Jehoshaphat going out into the land, into the infrastructure, making contact with people and saying in your day-to-day life, this is how you are going to honor God.

Moreover in Jerusalem, for the judgment of the Lord and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the chief fathers of Israel when they returned to Jerusalem, he commanded them saying, Thus you shall act in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart. Whatever case comes to you from your brethren who dwell in the cities, whether of bloodshed or offenses against the law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances, you shall warn them lest they trespass against the Lord, and wrath come upon you and your brethren. Daily life, daily issues, daily circumstances, application of the Word of God, as goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the believer, our soul in the New Testament, right? So what is your conclusion now about the best way to initiate reform and improvement? Internal, infrastructure, at the heart of daily life, or external and formal and symbolic on the Temple Mount? Which one works the best? Jehoshaphat or Joash? A king who has his own heart prepared to seek the Lord and who ensures that he communicates that and emphasizes it every place he has influence, or a king who is externally motivated by a priest and when the priest is gone, it all falls apart.

The two of them together remodeled the superficialities of the Temple, but the hearts of the people were never changed, never led to the true spiritual Mount Zion, so to speak. There is a very stark contrast here. Would you rather have the chest of Joash, and remember the chest filled up, and they were able to get enough money after a couple of dozen years to finally refurbish the Temple and eventually replace a lot of the implements and so on.

They got the gifts. How does that work? Do you remember, and I don't have time to turn there, but remember when Moses was going to build the tabernacle, and he asked for gifts from the people, and they brought gifts and brought gifts, and Moses finally had to say, Stop, stop, we've got too much. We're lugging this stuff around, I can't even use it.

Keep your combs and your earrings and your necklaces and your bracelets and your wall hangings and your trophies and your melted down Egyptian idols and all the rest of it. We've

got too much. Those people at that time, at the inception, had a heart for God and gave willingly, not grudgingly or out of necessity, but cheerfully, so much so, when's the last time any church had a giving program and they had to tell everybody, Please stop giving.

It's too much. You're giving too much money. Quit writing checks to the church.

Quit putting money in the plate. We're not even going to pass the plate. We're not even going to have a plate.

We're not going to have a box. You're giving way too much. I don't think there's any church in the history of America that has ever said, Stop giving.

It's too much. But that's what happens when, at least in that initial glow of contact with God and blessing from God and eating the manna that was descending from heaven, people understood what it was to have God dwelling in their midst. And they thought it was great and they wanted to build a house for His name.

These people didn't do it until Jehoiada and Joash engineered a way to more or less force them to drop stuff in the chest of Joash. And they did because it's easy. It's easy to give a monetary gift.

Go down and drop it in the chest of Joash and walk off and live your life the same way you lived it last week and the week before and the month before and the year before. But you can feel good about yourself because you gave. It's an overt superficial act of quote righteousness, right? But we know it was superficial because look at what happens as soon as Jehoiada is dead.

This stuff has just been simmering under the facade, under the shell, under the veneer. And it's sort of like unruly children who will behave as long as dad's in the room and no sooner does he walk out and you hear the click of the door than mayhem and chaos breaks loose. Out comes the indelible markers.

Out comes the matches. Out comes lighter fluid and trying to set the cat on fire and all the rest of it. As soon as the dad or the teacher is out of the room or in our society today if there's any excuse that's agreed to by any large group of people it's mob rule and chaos.

We can break windows. We can loot. We can riot.

We can overturn cars. We can set stuff on fire because the press will cover it and they will say we have a legitimate beef. No internal standard.

Examine yourselves. You remember 2 Corinthians 13 5? Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you unless? Everybody remembers the first part of that passage? Examine yourselves to see whether you're in the faith. Test yourselves. But the second part of it is do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you unless of course you fail the test.

When you examine yourself to see if you're in the faith and test yourself what you're really looking for is the Lord Jesus still sitting at the table. If He stood at the door and knocked and I got up and opened the door and let Him in and He sat down has He gotten up and left? Because I've made an inhospitable environment for Him. I am no longer valuing His Word loving it and keeping it.

And because of that His presence is no longer there. You can lose the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can lose the presence of God the Father.

You can lose the influence of God's Holy Spirit although you cannot lose His presence. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit and unfortunately for Him He is stuck to us no matter what. He's a seal and that seal will not be broken and opened until the judgment seat of Christ.

He is the mark of God's ownership on us. But the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our souls and the presence of God the Father as we know from the Gospel of John is contingent upon, predicated upon, conditioned upon loving and keeping God's Word. They will come and stay and make their home with us.

They will also pack up and leave if we create conditions where they cannot stay. Examine yourselves. See if you are in the faith.

Don't see if your mom and dad are in the faith. Don't see if your brother or sister is in the faith. Don't see if your child is in the faith.

Am I in the faith? It doesn't say examine each other. Does it? Examine yourselves. Examine yourselves.

This is what Joe Ash is a wonderful illustration of in the negative. Joe Ash is always looking to the outside. Well, if enough, if either somebody important enough like Jehoiada or enough people like these elders tell me something is right, that's what I'm going to go with.

And he's hollow. He's got no inner strength. He has no presence and power of God.

You know that the Davidic king on the throne in Jerusalem has the privilege of the resident presence and power of God's Holy Spirit. That's the gift that God gave to David. That's the gift that God gave to Solomon.

And it is the heritage of the kings descended from David to have that gift of God. Joe Ash does not have it. It is nowhere in evidence.

It's available. He doesn't claim it. The Lord Jesus says, even in the last days of the Old Testament age, will not your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit such as we enjoy was available in the Old Testament sense by request to those who sought it, to those who valued it, to those who cultivated it. It wasn't an automatic gift as it is for us. But we can certainly squash it.

We can grieve the Spirit. We can quench the Spirit. We can render His presence and power moot in our lives if we follow the pattern of Joe Ash.

But look at the contrast just a generation earlier with Jehoshaphat. This is how you build strength. This is how you obtain shalom, peace.

Valuing the Word of God in the daily infrastructure part of life. Not the overt, shiny facade. Not gilding the temple and refurbishing the exterior.

Building the hearts of the people with the Word of God. Ensuring that justice is done. That righteousness is based on the Word of God.

This is what you and I are challenged to do in the Kingdom that is our soul. Cultivate the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit. The illumination of the Word of God that is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

And be courageous and strong and willing to stick to those truths, those principles, that standard of righteousness no matter what. Are we, any of us, still made of the stuff that the early Christians were made of? They would not recant even when they were thrown to the lions. They would not recant even when they were burned at the stake.

They would not recant when they were stood in front of people who had the power of torture and death over them. They would never deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because they weren't driven by expediency.

They weren't driven by emotion or feeling or what is best in the great world of me, myself, and I. They had bound themselves to the truth of God and they would not compromise it for anything. They were faithful unto death. Be faithful unto death, Jesus says in Revelation, and I will give you the crown of life.

Be faithful unto death. We have not resisted to the point of blood. We keel over with very small tests, very slight challenges.

And it is a shame. Think of Joash. Think of Jehoshaphat.

The best days of Jehoshaphat when he understood what builds a kingdom that reflects the glory of God. Well, let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we're going to see the ignominious end of Joash and the Lord Jesus has something to say about it, oddly enough.