

RAMAH MONTHLY



*a monthly devotional
for Ramah Baptist Church*

July 2025
More Kings and Chronicles

INTRODUCTION

Saints,

Press on in your study of God's Word. You'll never regret one moment spent knowing Christ through the Scriptures. These readings continue through the time of the divided kingdom in Israel as well as many psalms. Both the story and poetry of God's Word shape us into being more like Christ.

The weekend devotionals generally relate to the matter of church discipline, a subject that all healthy churches must take seriously and a subject that be addressed from the lips of Jesus in our sermon texts in July.

The Scripture text for Sunday's sermon is also included each weekend so that you can read and pray over the text in advance. You'll be amazed at how much more you get from the Lord's Day service when you prepare your heart in advance.

At the end of the booklet is this month's hymn we will be learning together including an introduction from Pastor Laramie and a recording link to listen to the hymn. Again, you'll be amazed at how much more you'll grow in singing God's praise with just a short amount or preparation.

We pray this resource better equips you in knowing, loving, and serving our great God.




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FOR GOD FOR THE CHURCH FOR THE WORLD

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Monday, June 30

Read: Psalms 31–32

Christians know that we should trust God at all times, but many times that is easier said than done. We know we should trust God, but when life is hard or scary we may not be sure how to truly trust God. The psalms help us put our faith into practice. In **Psalm 31** David gives expression to the sorrow and fear that so many experience, yet he trusts God. David praises Yahweh as his refuge, rock, and fortress. He rejoices in the Lord, but this is not a superficial joy. It is not as if David hasn't actually experienced tough times in his life. We've read about the king's many highs and lows, but even here in the text he says: "I am in distress; My eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also. For my life is worn down with sorrow . . ." Are you wasting away in your grief? Are you worn down with sorrow? Many Christians don't even realize that the Bible speaks so candidly about the common experiences of life. The psalms help us put our grief into words and show us how to truly trust God. The tide turns for David in verse 14 when he shifts his focus from his enemies to God: "But as for me, I trust in You." David focuses his attention on who God is, which allows him to truly trust God.

The greatest example of trusting God comes from our Lord Jesus himself, who quoted this psalm at Calvary. Did you know Jesus memorized Scripture? From his youth he studied God's Word. When Jesus quoted a psalm, he wasn't just referring to one phrase but its whole context. As Jesus hung in your place on the cross, he trusted the Lord: "Into your hand I commit my spirit." Jesus perfectly pictured trusting God in the worst of circumstances. None of us will ever face sorrowful grief as deep as Jesus faced. However, by the Spirit at work in us, we can trust the Father just like the Son.

The Psalms began with a picture of the blessed man in Psalms 1–2. The entire psalter fleshes out the idea of being blessed by God. **Psalm 32** teaches us that the true blessing comes through having our transgressions forgiven. Much like Psalm 51, this psalm reflects David's repentant heart after committing great offense against God. As you read the text, do you think of your sin as seriously as David? Do you try to cover your sins or do you trust God to cover your sins through Christ? Knowing that in Christ your sins are forgiven, you can truly "Be glad in Yahweh and rejoice" (32:11).

The word of the Lord has come through Elijah to the rebellious northern kingdom that keeps looking more like Canaan than the Promised Land. God has used this remarkable prophet for his own purposes, but now Elijah's work is done. The ministry is being passed to Elisha, whom we briefly met in 1 Kings 19. 2 Kings 2 begins by telling us that Elijah is going to be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. This unusual earthly exit must not be the focus of the passage because it's revealed from the beginning. Instead the focus seems to be on the transition of ministry from Elijah to Elisha. Like Moses and Joshua before them, the narrator is drawing our attention more to the message than the messenger. God's work will certainly carry on. How will the new prophet be received?

Elisha, as well as the sons of the prophets, know that change is quickly approaching and Elijah is about to depart. For some unexplained reason, Elijah doesn't seem to want Elisha to follow him. Perhaps this is merely a test for the next mouthpiece of God, but Elisha stays near to his father in ministry and requests the blessing that an oldest son would receive—a double portion. Remember that Elisha left father and mother and earthly blessings to follow the Lord. God has already announced that Elisha would succeed Elijah. Elisha wants to serve the Lord in a strength that is stronger than his own. It is a hard thing for Elijah to give this spiritual blessing, but it is no problem at all for the Spirit of God.

Only one verse describes Elijah's exodus. Elisha's mourning is quickly replaced by ministry. He takes the mantle (a cloak or outer garment) and begins to serve Yahweh, the God of Elijah. Moses and his successor Joshua had both miraculously parted water. So did Elijah and now his successor Elisha. Things have deteriorated greatly in the Promised Land since the days of Moses and yet God is not done with his people. He is still speaking and working through his prophet.

Joshua had cursed ancient Jericho, but this new Joshua is able to remove the curse and heal the water which ultimately is bringing life to the city. By the word of the Lord, resurrection life is brought to sinful people. When God's words are welcomed there is a blessing, as pictured at Jericho. When God's words are rejected there is cursing from God, as seen at Bethel. These are not children but scoffing young men. Their fate will be the fate of all who reject the word of God on the last day.

Wednesday, July 2

Read: Psalms 35–36

Have you ever been falsely accused? Perhaps it was a minor confusion that could easily be corrected. Or perhaps it was a life-altering charge that could have ruined everything you stand for and had worked towards. Where do you turn when false charges arise? In **Psalm 35** David turned to Yahweh to contend for him against the contentious. David trusted the Lord to fight those who tried to pick a fight with him. The psalm seems to move through three cycles of David describing these malicious witnesses and then resolving to trust in God (35:1–10; 11–18; 19–28). We certainly have to train ourselves to turn to God time and time again. Wouldn't it be great if we could take our burdens to the Lord and leave them there? Too often we fail to take our cares to God in prayer, we fail to trust him to hear, and we fail to trust him enough to leave the burdens with him. We keep right on worrying as if we hadn't told the King of the Universe about our problem. The psalms model for us how to continually turn to and trust in the Lord. David prays that the Lord would remind him, "I am your salvation" (35:2). By the end of that movement, he indeed is rejoicing in the salvation of Yahweh (35:10). Even as those false charges kept ringing in his ears, he continued to turn to God. Jesus suffered the greatest false charges imaginable, and he trusted in Yahweh. Let the psalm point you to Christ, so that your tongue can tell the righteousness of God and his praises all day long (35:28).

In **Psalm 36** David continues to contrast the wicked and the upright in heart (remember how the whole book of Psalms is painting that picture of the blessed standing out against the wicked.) Verse 1 offers a chief characteristic of the wicked: there is no fear of God before their eyes. What an apt explanation of sinners: they have no dread of God. They do not acknowledge him or respect him. God simply is not a part of their moral calculation. David explains that people minimize God in their thinking and elevate themselves, convincing themselves that their sins will never find them out. When Paul assembled a long list of Old Testament quotations in Romans 3 that explain the great depravity of humankind, he brought his list to completion with this very verse: there is no fear of God before their eyes (Rom 3:18). The problem for sinful humanity has not changed over these thousands of years, but God's solution remains the same: Jesus Christ, the just and the justifier (Romans 3:26).

Elisha is ministering in the spirit of Elijah. The same God who worked through Elijah mightily, publicly on Mount Carmel also is working mightily, privately through Elisha. We see multiple miracles in 2 Kings 4, all containing echoes of Elijah but also pointing us to Christ through Elisha. In the first scene 4:1–7, a woman who has lost her husband is about to lose her children into slavery due to her great debt. In every way she is about to lose everything. Just like in the days of Elijah, God multiplies oil through the word of Elisha for this widow. The word of God brings life.

Elisha is supported in ministry by a Shunammite woman who frequently prepares meals for the prophet and eventually adds a room onto her house to meet his needs. Whereas the widow in the first scene was vulnerable, this woman is powerful due to her wealth and her safety among her own family. Yet, her situation could change at any moment due to the age of her husband and the lack of an heir. Despite her Abraham and Sarah-like situation, Elisha promises her that she will be blessed with a child. The word of God brings life.

Time moves forward in scene three as this unexpected but beloved son actually dies in his mother's arms. What a tragic ending that would be, but this mother knows this can't be the end. She hurries to find the man of God even though it's not a normal time to visit him. Learning the situation, Elisha sends his younger and faster servant ahead even as he and the woman return to her house. The prophet prays and then acts out the work that the Spirit of God is doing, raising this child to life.

The final scene involves more death as the famine is causing people to scavenge for food, accidentally mixing poisonous ingredients into the pot. The small amount of flour that Elisha adds to the poisoned pot of stew is but a visual reminder that the word of God is actually making the difference. The prophet's multiplication of food to feed a crowd is but a preview of what Christ will do with thousands. The chapter concludes making it plain that this miracle happened according to the word of the Lord. The word of God brings life.

In the days of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and his apostles, God often validated his messengers by miracles. The miracles pointed to the authority and trustworthiness of the messenger. Today we need not look for miracles; God has given us his authoritative, trustworthy Bible. It contains all we need for life and godliness. The word of God brings life.

Friday, July 4

Read: 2 Kings 5; Psalm 39

Our God is not a local god. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is sovereign over every nation and gives victory to whom he pleases. He saves people from every tribe, tongue, and nation; indeed, God gives salvation to whom he pleases. We see these truths pictured in the life of one man, Naaman the Syrian.

The commander of Syria's army, Naaman, seems to have it all! He is a great man, a mighty man, a favored man. There's just one problem: he's also a leprous man. While not a Jew and not subject to the ceremonial laws of Israel, this leprosy most certainly negatively impacts the general's life. By the providence of God, a little girl is the source of hope for this big man. Word gets to Naaman and eventually the king of Syria that perhaps there is hope for the leper in the land of Israel. However, when the king of Israel gets wind of the situation, he is not filled with faith but fear. The king of God's people should have confidence in the one who kills and makes alive—Yahweh. The king of the northern kingdom should have heard about the prophet at work in his midst—Elisha, who works many miracles bringing life. The ungodly Syrians seem to have more faith than the king of Israel.

Elisha hears of Naaman's situation and the king's fear, but the man of God knows leprosy is no problem for God. He sends word to the commander, but it is not the word Naaman expected. After traveling all the way from Syria to see this prophet, Naaman expected a great show. If he couldn't see a great show, at least Elisha could have sent him to the great rivers at home instead of the dirty water in Israel. Naaman is thoroughly unimpressed. Even his servants understand the situation better than the great general. They recognize that Elisha is inviting their master to have his flesh restored. His life will be changed forever if he simply accepts the word of God by faith. The mighty warrior must trust God with childlike faith. Naaman's heart is changed, he obeys, and he is healed. Like the skin of the little girl who first told about the power of God, Naaman is healed.

The servant of Syria now worships Yahweh, but the servant of Elisha, who has seen the many miracles of Yahweh does not truly worship the Lord. Gehazi is more interested in the things of earth than the resurrection life that Yahweh brings. This may not be the way we expected the story to end, but these are the stories God writes. He gives salvation freely by faith.

RAMAH MONTHLY

Weekend Devotion: More Than Worth It: Costs and Benefits of Church Discipline

He was a middle-aged pastor of a nice-sized and fairly affluent church. The church was theologically conservative and held a high view of Scripture, which is what made his comment so tragically memorable.

He had asked me what I was working on, to which I answered, “A case of church discipline.” I had been strongly convicted about taking God at his Word concerning church discipline. My own congregation had recently endured a difficult and painful situation, so I shared that I felt we would not be faithful if we did not strive to obey God in this area.

This was his response: “You’re right, of course. But, you know, I decided early in my ministry what I would and would not be about, and that’s just not a road I’m going to go down.”

I’ve never forgotten his words. It’s no small thing to deliberately decide to not heed Christ’s instructions (Matt. 18:15–18), apostolic application of divine truth (1 Cor. 5:1–7, 12–13), restorative congregational instruction (2 Cor. 2:6–8), a call to “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1–5), clear apostolic command (2 Thess. 3:6–10, Titus 3:9–11), injunctions to steer clear of those who disobey these instructions (2 Thess. 3:14), a God-ordained tool for instruction against blasphemy (1 Tim. 1:19b–20), and an unambiguous command that we “keep these rules” (1 Tim. 5:19–21).

Even so, many pastors have chosen not to go down “that road.” They want job security. They want to avoid the difficulties of confrontation. They want to steer clear of the complex dynamics that inevitably surface in a congregation when we practice church discipline.

It’s worth reminding ourselves as pastors what we stand to lose if we neglect biblical church discipline, as well as what we stand to gain by faithfully following God’s Word.

What We Stand to Lose

1. The Blessing and Favor of God

By neglecting church discipline, we stand to lose the blessings and favor of God. To make a knowing, intentional, and deliberate decision to write “No!” over the biblical teachings concerning church discipline is to write “Ichabod!” over the church. One seeks in vain for the blessing and favor of God when one chooses to ignore his instructions for his bride.

2. Our Fallen Members

We may also lose our fallen members. Here is a sad irony: the fallen members that we don't want to "judge," "hurt," or "drive away" will, if left in their sins and robbed of the church's call for repentance, find themselves eventually despising and leaving the church anyway. Even if they don't leave, their inward distance from God makes their presence a mere façade, which means we've lost them anyway.

3. Our Faithful Members

If we fail to take seriously the whole counsel of God, we risk alienating those members who do take God's counsel seriously. How odd it is to give up faithful members because we fear lovingly calling wayward members back to the Lord through the ministry of church discipline!

4. Our Witness Before the Watching World

The world may despise the gospel, but at least it respects consistency. When we fail to speak the truth to those who shipwreck their faith, thereby complying with their harmful rebellion, the watching world turns away in derision at the open hypocrisy of the church.

5. Our Authority to Speak

What right do we have to speak a prophetic word to our culture about unhinged sexual libertinism if the very same rebellion runs unchecked in our churches? What right do we have to speak against corruption and greed if we fail to confront those things in our own church? To tear out the passages on church discipline is to tear out our own tongue.

What We Stand to Gain

1. The Favor of God

By practicing biblical church discipline, we stand to gain the favor of God. It is appropriate to apply "Well done thy good and faithful servant!" to local congregations in addition to individual Christians. The favor and pleasure of God should be our primary motivation for embracing biblical church discipline.

2. The Growth of Our Brother or Sister

Discipline also leads to growth. Church discipline is almost certainly the most neglected avenue of Christian growth in the body of Christ today. Yet lovingly administered church discipline helps believers grow in obedience to Christ.

3. Power in the Pulpit

Another benefit pastors often miss by not practicing church discipline? Obeying Christ in difficult ways empowers our preaching. A congregation that watches its ministers faithfully apply the Word will take that Word more seriously, and listen more intently. And, as he leads the congregation in obeying God's Word, the preacher himself will grow in rightly grasping and boldly applying God's Word in his preaching.

4. The Unity of the Church

Unity around anything other than the whole counsel of God is not unity. It is merely a shadowy, patchwork peace constructed on whatever bits of God's Word we deem acceptable. Only authentic unity, a unity that embraces all of God's Word, can claim the blessing of God.

5. Evangelistic Contrast

In a day that has seen many churches reduce its evangelism to programs and its outreach to gimmickry, we too often forget the inherent evangelistic appeal of the people of God being who they're meant to be. This works itself out in what we might call the evangelistic ministry of contrast: as the church grows in holiness, it creates an increasingly stark contrast with the lost culture around it. When this happens, the world begins to see that the church presents a genuine countercultural alternative, an alternative that emanates from convictions clearly founded on a higher standard than its own.

Choosing the Better Road

It was some years after the sad conversation that I recounted earlier that I crossed paths with another minister, roughly the same age as the first. He was likewise the pastor of a good-sized church. He, too, was conservative in theology and held a high view of Scripture. We were talking about ministry, life, and the challenge of church discipline, and he too said something I will never forget: "You know, I just want to pastor a New Testament church once before I die. I believe we can be that, and I want to lead my people to be that."

Two men. Two paths. Two alternatives. The first brother, I am convinced, is going to pay a high price for pursuing ease and comfort. The latter may occasionally pay a temporal price in discomfort and possible conflict, but his reward will be great.

Choose the better way. Isn't the choice obvious?

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Wyman
Richardson



This Sunday's Sermon:
The Book of Titus

Monday, July 7

Read: 2 Kings 6:1–23; Psalms 40–41

Aren't you glad that God is able to meet small needs as well as large ones? God worked miraculously through Elijah and continued to bring life in deadly situations. With a double portion of Elijah's ministry upon him, the Spirit of God continues to work in Elisha in big ways and small ways, but always pointing to the life found in the word of the Lord.

The first scene can seem perplexing until we remember the value of this axe head for the young prophet in training. If he had to repay the cost of the iron tool himself, the debt could be crippling and could eventually lead to slavery like in the case of the widow in Chapter 4. Elisha isn't simply helping a student, but he is continuing to bring the life-giving, freeing word of God.

In the second scene Elisha is working on a national level to preserve the people of God. We saw uneasiness between Israel and Syria in chapter 5 when Naaman the Syrian commander went to Elisha the Israelite for healing. Remember that the king of Israel thought the Syrian king was trying to use the situation to start a war. Now Syria is making raids upon Israel, but God's people keep avoiding their attacks. The man of God Elisha warns the king of Israel so often the king of Syria is convinced he's got a spy in his administration. The king of Syria makes plans to seize this prophet who seems to know his deepest secrets (and battleplans!).

The king of Syria sends a large army to surround the city of Dothan and seize one man—the man of God. Elisha's servant sees the great army, but Elisha desires for him to see God's greater army. God gives Elisha's servant sight to see the spiritual reality of God's army. Then when the army of the Syrians begins to close in to attack, the man of God prays that the enemies' eyes would be blinded. Whether their eyes are literally no longer able to see or possibly only dazed to the reality of the situation (unlike the servant), Elisha leads the enemy army of Syria right into the heart of Samaria, the capital of Israel. The king of Israel can hardly believe his good fortune in this “battle.” The king seeks and submits to the direction of the prophet Elisha, recognizing his authority by calling him “father.” This is the last of the raids upon Israel. Soon war will come, but the man of God will work for the people of God in matters both big and small. The word of God brought by the prophet of God will bring life.

The temporary peace is over. Syria's raids were stopped by Elisha, but that doesn't mean the enemy intends to stop the war. The king of Syria rouses his whole army and heads towards the capital of the Northern Kingdom in Samaria. As they put the city under siege, great famine sweeps through the city. Starvation and inflation are so severe that an unclean animal like a donkey is sold for food at exorbitant prices. Things become so desperate that mothers are eating their children. As this woman seeks justice from her king, how does he respond? He blames Elisha for the famine. He plans to execute the "father" he was just honoring a few verses earlier. Israel has fallen a long way since the days of Solomon who had godly wisdom when dealing with disputing mothers.

Twice in 7:1, Elisha stresses that he's going to announce the Word of the Lord. What have we seen time and again in Kings? God brings life through his word. The man of God is bringing the word of God. Elisha is on record for his accuracy and faithfulness in speaking on behalf of God, so when he announces that the famine is about to be over we would expect people to hear him and rejoice. God is speaking and relieving their suffering! The king's right hand man, who should know exactly who Elisha is and what he can do, scoffs. The Word of the Lord will not relieve his suffering but precede his judgment.

God works in such mysterious ways sometimes. He delivers his people in battle but not by their might and not because they deserve it. God causes the Syrians to hear the sounds of approaching enemy armies that don't exist. The Hittites and Egyptians have not been hired by Israel to attack Syria, but Syria thinks so and they flee. A most unlikely group of messengers deliver the good news to the king of Israel, but he doesn't trust the news! He thinks it is all a trap to lure them out of safety into danger. Soon enough it becomes clear that God's Word through the prophet has come true. The famine is over because God has given his people the spoils of battle. God's judgment is true because the scoffer dies without enjoying the blessing of God's deliverance.

Even though God continues to bring victory through the man of God, things aren't looking good for the nation. This seems to be only a foretaste of what is to come for Israel through judgment. They should be praising the Lord and yet they seem to be walking in unbelief. Let this not be said of us.

Wednesday, July 9

Read: 2 Kings 8

We often read and think about history in a linear fashion, but that is not always the way history is given to us in Scripture. 2 Kings 8 presents the Shunammite woman from 4:8–37 again, but the timing of the story seems to be earlier than it's given in the text. We also see Gehazi again in his pre-leprous condition. The king of Israel is asking about the great things of Elisha when he just witnessed them in chapters 6 and 7. It seems that the author of Kings has given us an earlier story at this point in the book in order to connect with the theme of famine we just saw in 6:24–7:20. When we first met the Shunammite woman, she needed no help or repayment from Elisha because of the security of her family and homeland (4:13). However, when famine strikes in Israel, Elisha encourages her to go to the land of the Philistines for provision. Seven years later when she returns, all has been taken from her. Based on the reputation of Elisha and the miracle in her son's life, the woman's house and land are restored.

God had told Elijah way back in 1 Kings 19 that Hazael would be anointed as king over Syria. God's Word is fulfilled now by Elisha. Ben-hadad is just another in a long list of sick kings in this book. Some have suggested this is because earthly kings will always fail us. Others have suggested it is also because all of the other kings are falling short of the standard set by David and Solomon. Elisha tells Hazael that he will soon be king, but the prophet also stares down the soon-to-be assassin and is moved to tears. Elisha knows the wickedness that is to come upon Israel at his hands. We get a preview in the murder of Ben-hadad.

The story shifts back to the southern kingdom of Judah in verse 16. Strangely enough, the names of the kings in both the north and the south are the same: Joram, also known as Jehoram. We have common names shared by many people today (think John or Mary), but perhaps this isn't a mere coincidence after all. The text explicitly says in verse 18 that the king of Judah walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. These kings with the same name are practically indistinguishable in their evil. The next king in Judah Ahaziah is sadly connected to Ahab, the worst king in their history. Things continue to get darker in Judah, Israel, and Syria. God graciously continues to provide and bless his faithful remnant like Elisha and the Shunammite woman.

The psalms were given to shape the people of God into faithful worshippers of Yahweh. They're not random files in a drawer that can be pulled as needed. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the book of Psalms has been given to us in a particular order with a particular movement. Psalms 42–43 begin Book II in the Psalter. They most likely were originally written as one psalm; they certainly should be read together for a fuller understanding. Notice that Psalm 43 has no title while so many around it do. Notice also the repetition that continues from one psalm to the next (see 42:5, 11; 43:5):

*Why are you in despair, O my soul?
And why are you disturbed within me?
Wait for God, for I shall still praise Him,
For the salvation of His presence.*

We've noticed how often the psalms in Book I ask the question, how can a righteous man be blessed in an unrighteous world? Book II often asks the same question, but broadens the question from the personal level to the national level. If you fast forward to the end of Book II, you'll hear the psalmist say: "Let all nations be blessed in him; Let all nations call him blessed" (Ps 72:17). The blessing for the nation can be found in the same place that the blessing for the individual can be found: in Yahweh. As you read through Book II of the psalms, notice the movement from despair towards rejoicing in God. As the Spirit continues to shape us into the image of Christ, we will continue to turn our thirsty, cast down souls to the living water Jesus Christ (see John 4:10; 7:37).

Notice also how the psalmist is speaking to himself. In that refrain found three times in two psalms, he speaks to himself: "Why are you in despair, O my soul?" The psalmist is honest about his situation. He is realistic about the way we sometimes feel separated from God. Due to spiritual dryness, sin in our hearts, or a variety of reasons, we may sometimes feel spiritually separated from God. In those dark moments, we must speak truth to our souls. We must know God's Word and remind ourselves of it. Speak to your soul, no matter how desperate I may feel, nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). Rest assured, dear Christian, that the psalms are shaping you into faithful worshippers of God.

Friday, July 11

Read: Psalms 50, 53, 55

The Bible clearly portrays God as the judge of all the earth. Does this comfort you or disturb you? **Psalm 50** powerfully pictures Yahweh as the mighty judge of his people. God brings his testimony against his own chosen people. They cannot take comfort in sacrifices done apart from a true relationship with God. Like he often does through the prophets in Scripture, God speaks strong words of conviction to those who have become callous to his covenant. May the text disturb our drifting, cold hearts back to the God of who has saved us. May we never forget God! May we remember he is not like us! But to those who are sincerely walking with God through Christ, the just judge comforts: “I shall show the salvation of God” (50:23).

Remember that Book II of the Psalms is comparing the righteous and the wicked on a national level like Book I made this comparison on a personal level. **Psalm 53** is almost identical to Psalm 14 but with a few noticeable differences. Psalm 14 often used the covenant name for God—Yahweh. Psalm 53 instead uses the generic word for God. What might seem like a minor difference actually reminds us of a big lesson: God is not just the judge of Israel only as you might think from Psalm 14 (or 50) or just the judge of Christians as some people today might imagine. No, he is the judge of the living and the dead, the judge of heaven and earth, whether you acknowledge that or not. When the psalmist looked at Israel, the people of God in Psalm 14, he noted the great wickedness of sin. When the psalmist looks at the entire earth in Psalm 53, he notes the great wickedness of sin. Paul picks up this language in Romans 3:10–12 to remind us again of the universal problem of sin, but then he reminds us that the just judge is also the one who justifies through Jesus Christ.

Time and again, David has tuned our hearts to turn to God when enemies attack. He has felt the attack of many enemies and continued to trust God. In **Psalm 55** David’s enemy is much closer. It is a close companion, a faithful friend. Whether David is referring to his beloved son Absalom, his trusted counselor Ahithophel, or some other circumstance we’re not familiar with, the psalm gives us another circumstance in which we must trust Yahweh to save. We cast our burdens on Yahweh to sustain us and rightly judge the situation, knowing that he judges justly and he truly cares for us (see 1 Peter 2:23, 5:7).

Weekend Devotion: Four Reasons Churches Don't Practice Church Discipline

Some churches don't practice discipline because they're unaware of the biblical mandate or unsure how to start the process. Others, however, have concerns about the potential consequences of such a practice. They know what Scripture teaches on the matter but remain unconvinced as to its legitimacy or pragmatic viability.

Churches reject the practice of church discipline for lots of reasons. Some believe the practice doesn't comport with the biblical concept of love. Related to that idea, some will point out that none of us are perfect, and therefore we should not be focused on getting rid of people when they sin. Still others maintain that the church can err in their practice of church discipline since the church is filled with fallible, sinful human beings. Finally, some maintain such a practice is far too invasive of private lives. These objections will be considered and answered.

Objection #1: Discipline Is Unloving

Many look at any form of discipline as arrogant, cruel, and unloving. Love is meant to look past sin and let things go; it covers a multitude of sin (1 Peter 4:8). However, ultimately knowing that sin leads to death (Rom. 6:23), the church must understand that discipline is in fact a loving act. As a declarative sign of potential eschatological judgment, discipline is meant to serve as both a call to repentance and a means to persevering in the faith. What may seem unloving is in fact meant to demonstrate the greatest kind of love, pointing someone to eternal life.

God demonstrates his love through disciplinary acts (Heb. 12:3–11; cf. 1 Cor. 11:17–32), as he seeks to turn the hearts of his people toward holiness. He has delegated a version of this divine authority to the church as well, so as to discipline for the same purposes (Matt. 16:16–19; 18:15–17). The goal of church discipline is to see members of the church pursuing maturity in godliness. God makes it clear that his people will be marked by holiness (1 Peter 1:15–16; cf. Heb. 12:14), and discipline is one means toward pursuing holiness. Therefore when done as God directs, discipline is a loving act.

Objection #2: The Church Is Filled with Sinners

Others object to discipline in the church because everyone is guilty of sin. The argument here is that discipline is hypocritical since no one is guiltless; we're all marred by sin. While this is true, it doesn't negate the obvious texts in Scripture that call for church discipline to be exercised. Far from negating the practice of ecclesial discipline, the presence of our own sin should chasten our approach and humble us.

Consider, for example, Matthew 7:1, wherein the reader is told, "Judge not, lest you
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you also be judged.” Interestingly, in our present-day culture, the idea of judging another person is seen as arrogant and narrow-minded, and this verse is often used as ammunition against a concept like church discipline. This, however, would be a misreading of the text. In fact, we’re specifically told to judge one another within the church (though not in the final way that God judges); Jesus’ words in Matthew 18 and Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 5–6 clearly show that the church is to exercise judgment. Judgment in the local church context is necessary and appropriate, but it must be done in a certain way, or else it is sinful (cf. Matt. 7:2–5; Gal. 6:1).

The church is certainly not to condemn others unjustly. The imagery in Matthew 7:1–5 (the speck and log in one’s eye) suggests we must be self-critical when it comes to our own sin, but this is done not for the purpose of excluding the judgment of others altogether, but as a prerequisite to judging. This fits with Galatians 6:1, which tells us we who are spiritual should seek to restore those who have sinned with a spirit of gentleness and an eye on ourselves, lest we too be tempted to sin. Therefore, Jesus and Paul haven’t condemned judging altogether but have rather called the church to be above reproach in the way they do so by examining their own hearts first.

Objection #3: The Church Can Be Wrong

Some will question the legitimacy of the church’s authority in issuing a warning to unrepentant sinners. If the church is not infallible, will the judgment rendered against a sinning individual always be correct? This is a crucial question to answer.

When considering the legitimacy of such a pronouncement coming from the church, one must take into consideration key passages from Matthew 16 and 18. These deal specifically with the authority given through the keys of the kingdom, as well as the concomitant power granted to the church in binding and loosing (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). Jesus doesn’t give the church *carte blanche* to do whatever it pleases and assume his blessing on all actions. In fact, he offers a stern warning to churches not to abuse this principle and practice. Jesus is giving a promise concerning a very specific situation: the maintenance of the integrity of the body of Christ. As such, if the church is to possess the authority as stated in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, the community must act in accord with the truth of Scripture and distinct details of each disciplinary situation.

So, when a church—no matter how large and influential or small and seemingly inconsequential—acts in accordance with God’s Word, their authority is real, albeit mediated. The church possesses a kind of power such that there’s heavenly recognition of earthly transactions—but only when handled according to divine directions.

Exercising discipline in the church, then, is a most delicate affair. Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully summarizes the proper interpretation of these passages, saying,

“Ultimately, only God can judge the human heart. At the same time, the church has received a dominical and apostolic commission to preserve the truth and to pursue holiness.” The church, therefore, must humbly and discerningly apply their authority granted to them by Christ.

Church discipline, therefore, is a “warning,” not a binding “pronouncement.” The church recognizes God as the ultimate judge of all things. So, even though discipline connotes a proper tone of serious admonition, a warning of “potential” judgment, it doesn’t become unerringly certain because the church is filled with fallible sinners. It should, however, be taken with all seriousness.

Objection #4: Discipline Is Overly Invasive

One final objection that may be raised is over the issue of privacy. Discipline seems to be too far-reaching because it “invades” the privacy of people’s lives and turns often private sin into a public spectacle. To exact discipline, some would argue, would bring about undue humiliation over details that ought not to be known by the public.

This objection may feel right in a culture that so highly values autonomy and individual expression, but it goes against the grain of the Bible. Faith involves the end of self-enthronement. At the heart of faith is the idea of submitting to the authority of another. Specifically, believers are called to submit to God and his kingdom rule, the local church and its leadership.⁹ Submission to Christ’s kingdom means a submission to the present earthly outpost of his kingdom, that is, the church. In becoming a member of this new covenant kingdom community, we submit ourselves to the divinely mediated discipline of the church. As Mark Dever often says, if you’re a Christian, your spiritual life is other people’s business.

In summary, church discipline isn’t an unloving, invasive act, perpetrated by wicked people. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes, “Nothing can be crueller than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.” As such, discipline must be exacted in the church and done humbly, gently, and carefully, always aiming for love and always pointing someone to repentance and life in Christ.



Jeremy
Kimble

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***This Sunday’s Sermon:
Matthew 18:1–14***

Monday, July 14

Read: Psalms 58, 78

Sometimes the Bible makes us uncomfortable. We know that Jesus is king. We know that he will return in glory. We know that when he comes, he will come in judgment. But sometimes the Bible talks about that judgment in ways that catch us off guard. God's Spirit challenges us with his words: do we really believe what we say we do?

Psalms 58 is one of these passages. David prays in verse 6, "O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth." We know that he is praying against the wicked, venomous men who have been satanic in their serpent ways since birth. We know that there are truly wicked people like this in the world today. But to pray this way seems out of place in our view of the Christian life. Should we really desire for our enemies to be "like the miscarriages of a woman which never behold the sun" as David prays in verse 8?

Whose are the enemies in this psalm? Are they merely David's personal enemies? No, they are God's enemies. They pretend to speak righteousness, but they actually work unrighteousness (verses 1–2). And God has promised that he will certainly judge all unrighteousness. David's prayer is not for his own personal vengeance, but for God to do what he said he would do. The psalm calls for God to keep his Word, to fulfill the Scriptures. The psalms often use this type of language, sometimes called "imprecatory" which means the language has moved beyond mere sorrow or sadness to cursing and condemnation.

"The imprecatory language in the psalms is not unbridled expression of personal rage and vengeance made in a moment of passion. Imprecatory language is not the equivalent of cursing in anger. Rather, imprecatory psalms are expressions of confident trust that God will accomplish his purpose for mankind that he established at the beginning of history."

These are not "expressions of what *we* intend to do. We do not take up arms and crush our enemies with the sword. We have been commanded by Christ to love and pray for our enemies, to boldly proclaim the good news of the gospel, confident that God will save his elect through the gospel, turning enemies into friends. We currently live in an age of grace in which God through our proclamation of the gospel is gathering his people unto himself from out of the nations."¹

One day our king shall come. Will we be glad to see him defeat his enemies? Do we pray for God's perfect judgment to be carried out on God's enemies? Do we really believe this?

1 <https://g3min.org/should-christians-pray-imprecatory-prayers/>

Where should God's people turn in the midst of tragedy? The nation of Israel wrestled with this question during the days of David. You remember the many highs and lows of the people under the leadership of David. The great king led the people to great victories and they enjoyed many great benefits of living in God's Promised Land before the great sins of the great king led to their great downfall. The superscription of **Psalm 60** connects the dots between this text and a great victory in 2 Samuel 8. David led the nation to defeat many thousand of their enemies, but apparently it wasn't the smoothest of battles. The victory in the Valley of Salt was almost the victory that never was.

It must have been a day of great tragedy. Verses 1–5 of Psalm 60 express the sorrow of the people. They felt rejected. They felt broken. Surely the Lord must be angry with them. Surely they have sinned and are facing the consequences of disobeying God. The nation cried out to God. By the end of the psalm, they recognize that their only hope of valiant victory is through God. Only the Lord can fight their battles for them. Only the Lord can save them in their distress. He is the one to whom we must turn in the midst of tragedy.

The picture that Psalm 60 paints on a national level can be seen on a personal level in **Psalm 61**. David is experiencing a personal tragedy. His heart is faint. He needs strength. He needs refuge. Where does David turn in the midst of his own personal tragedy? To the rock that is higher, stronger, and better than himself. While many seek to take David's life, he knows that only God can add days to his life. Only God can preserve him. The Lord is David's only refuge, and he is our only refuge. In any tragedy, personal or national, large or small, let us turn to God.

Over and over in the Psalms, you will notice that the well-being of God's people is connected with the well-being of their king. At first glance David's prayer for long life might seem self-serving until you remember the necessity of God's people to be led by God's king. God has promised to preserve his king. When we read the end of Psalm 61, we can't help but remember there's a bigger story going on than just the life of David. God has promised an everlasting covenant with the Son of David, who will sit enthroned forever. Jesus Christ is our true refuge, our tower of strength. Turn to him today.

Wednesday, July 16

Read: Psalms 62–63

Where is your faith? What do you trust? **Psalms 62** stands as a testimony to faith in God. David writes about waiting for God alone. He waits in silence. He knows that God and God alone is his rock and salvation. Perhaps David has Absalom's threats in mind when he writes, but we know broadly that the world only offers death (62:3). The world will lie about everything and enjoy every second (62:4). So where do you turn? We must turn to God. David calls the entire congregation to trust in the Lord at all times. He is the one we trust. He is the steadfast, gracious God. He is worthy of our trust. **Psalms 63** also paints a vivid picture of the believer's trust in the Lord. We should earnestly seek the Lord. We should prize the lovingkindness of God over life itself. Morning, noon, and night God is worthy of our worship and worth meditating upon.

The Psalms tell us over and over to trust God. We know we should, but sometimes we forget why. Have you considered recently how worthy of a Savior we serve? He is a worthy object of our faith. The world often speaks about faith in a nebulous, squishy way that is hard to define. The attitude of many is to "keep up the faith" no matter the circumstances. What they seem to mean is that they want to keep an optimistic attitude. That's not bad in itself, but our confidence and optimism must arise from the right place (which is not ourselves). In other words, it's not enough to just have faith in faith itself. No, our faith must have an object.

When we sit down in a chair, we demonstrate our faith in the chair. Typically we don't measure the chair, examine its materials, and calculate its weight capacity before sitting down. We just sit down. What holds us up? Is it our faith in the chair that holds us up? No, it's the chair itself. It is a worthy object of our trust. Consider the two boys ice skating on a frozen pond. One boy apprehensively moves onto the ice inch by inch. His faith is weak. The other boy boldly skates out onto the ice. His faith is strong. Which boy will stay above the ice and which will sink? The one with strong faith or the one with weak faith? Both boys stay above the ice! It is not the intensity of faith that saves but the object. Jesus is strong enough to hold us up, no matter how weak our faith may be at any given moment. Keep trusting God, just like the psalms keep telling us.

Finishing well is rare. We see Christian leaders fail all the time, disqualifying themselves before the race is over. The Apostle Paul expressed his desire to finish well even as he finished his final writing in Scripture (see 2 Tim 4). When it comes to the kings of Judah, few finished well.

Joash (referred to as Jehoash in 2 Kings) started well. He was faithful when under the influence of the priest Jehoiada. Many have pointed out that the faithfulness of the kings discussed in the Book of Chronicles can be evaluated based on their actions and attitude toward the temple. Faithful Joash is concerned for the restoration of the temple. It had been sorely neglected during the reign of wicked Athaliah. Joash instructs the Levites to do their biblical duty and begin gathering the monies required from the people in the law of Moses to support the house of worship. The Levites did not carry out their duties quickly enough, so Joash took the lead on making sure the money was appropriately collected and used in the restoration of the temple. Things go well as long as the priest of God is there to influence the king. When Jehoiada dies, the worship of God immediately begins to be neglected. Jehoiada's influence can't be underestimated. His great age and influence are noted as this priest is buried among kings. With the godly priest gone, the officials in the land come and convince the young king that the old man's old-fashioned ways should be rejected. This is not the right path for someone who desires to finish well.

Jehoiada's faith abides in his son Zechariah. The priest boldly prophesies against the people, condemning them for their neglect of biblical worship. As happens so often, the people reject the truth of God's Word. At the direction of the king, they conspire to murder the man clothed in the Spirit of God. What a shocking reversal from the king who started well. With his dying breath, Zechariah announced that Yahweh would avenge his death. It's only a matter of time before Joash will face judgment.

As we've seen so many times before, God often sovereignly uses pagan nations to execute judgment on his people. Joash has not stayed true to the Scriptures, neglected the temple and worship of God, and even murdered a faithful priest of God. God does not overlook these sins, and he uses the recurring enemy Syrian army to defeat Israel. As Joash had earlier conspired to kill Jehoiada, now his officials conspire to kill him in vengeance for Zechariah's death. What a sad picture of a king who did not finish well. Let us learn and be faithful.

Friday, July 18

Read: 2 Kings 13; Psalm 65

Yesterday's reading focused on the southern kingdom of Judah and unfaithful king Joash. Today's reading shifts the focus back to the northern kingdom of Israel during that same time period. King Jehoahaz of Israel begins like any other wicked king in Israel's history. Because of his unfaithfulness, Yahweh's anger is poured out on Israel at the hand of both Hazael and his son Ben-hadad of Syria. In an echo from Judges, Jehoahaz calls upon Yahweh for help and God indeed raises up a savior for his people. The identity of this rescuer doesn't seem to be as important as recognizing the pattern. God gives his people rest until they once again begin to sin and face the consequences of those sins.

The new king in Israel has the same name as the king in Judah whom we read about previously: Joash. The Joash of Israel walks in the same sins of the kings before him, which are generally measured against their founding father Jeroboam who set the evil standard. We already saw that Joash of Judah began well but did not finish well. The text summarily tells of the death of both kings without much fanfare.

The text shifts one last time to Elisha, whom we haven't seen in about forty years. We are not told anything that happened in his ministry during these intervening years, but we find the prophet on his deathbed still ready to serve. King Joash weeps over Elisha and honors him in the same way that Elisha had previously honored Elijah. The man of God is more valuable to the nation than all of its chariots and horsemen. Elisha, too, knows that the nation's victory will come from the Lord and not their military might. The prophet promises the king a series of victories which apparently could have been greater if the king had been more enthusiastic about obeying the word of the Lord.

How many times has Elisha demonstrated life-giving power through the Word of the Lord? The prophet demonstrates this power once more in death. Joash may be tempted to think that God's promises died with the prophet, but God's Word brings life. If the nation will cling to the Word of God, it will be blessed with life. If the nation rejects God, it will bring certain death. The text is clear that God's promises were true even after the death of Elisha. Verse 23 makes plain that God's grace to Israel was not due to any goodness found in the rebellious nation. Instead, God showed his grace to Israel because of his promises to their forefathers. God's grace operates the same way today, by his good pleasure.

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Weekend Devotion: A Biblical Theology of Church Discipline

To some Christians, church discipline seems to contradict the whole shape of the Bible's story. Isn't the gospel all about Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners? Aren't we turning back the clock and putting believers back under the law if we start excluding people from the church for certain sins?

In this piece I want to uproot that intuition as gently and fully as I can, by showing how God's discipline of his people is an integral part of the Bible's entire storyline, from Eden to the new creation. We will consider this story in six steps, and close with three conclusions.

1. Eden and Points East

In the beginning, God's people were right where God wanted them, and were just what God wanted them to be. God created Adam and Eve. He brought her to him and united them. He put them in the garden he had made for them. He walked with them and talked with them face to face (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:4–25).

But it didn't last. Adam and Eve sinned, and God imposed on them a capital sentence and banished them. He drove them away east, out of his garden and away from his presence (Gen. 3:1–24). East of Eden, all of humanity sank so deep into sin that God destroyed the entire race by flood, save only one family (Gen 6–8). After the flood and humanity's new beginning, humanity's collective pride vaulted so high that God scrambled their tongues and scattered them over the earth (Gen. 10–11).

2. Discipline in the Desert

To begin to set things right, God called Abram. God covenanted to him a nation and a name, promising to bless all nations through him (Gen. 12:1–3). And God kept his promises, though not always in the most obvious ways. He did grant Abram offspring and multiply those offspring, warranting Abram's new name, Abraham (Gen. 17:5). But then he sent those offspring famine, and then to Egypt, and finally let them slip into slavery. At this point, they'd been so fruitful and multiplied so greatly that they filled the land (Exod. 1:7).

When God freed Abraham's offspring from slavery, he judged their captors with unremitting strictness. He plagued their land, executed their firstborn, and drowned their army (Exod. 3–14). But then God's people themselves needed discipline. Despite the staggering works God performed before their eyes, they disbelieved and complained. They refused to trust that the God who broke their chains could fill their stomachs (Exod. 16–17; Num. 11). They refused to trust that the God who bested Pharaoh could handle the enemies before them (Num. 14).

So God taught them and rebuked them. He provided for them and punished them. He gave them bread that would spoil if hoarded, so they would learn to trust him for daily bread (Exod. 16:13–30). He condemned that generation to die in the wilderness, allowing only their children to enter the Promised Land—the very children the Israelites thought God couldn’t protect from their enemies (Num. 14:13–38).

On the cusp of the Promised Land, Moses summed up the lessons they were meant to draw from this divine discipline in the Exodus and the desert:

You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always. And consider today (since I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it), consider the discipline of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, his signs and his deeds that he did in Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land, and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and to their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord has destroyed them to this day, and what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place, and what he did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, son of Reuben, how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel. For your eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord that he did.
(Deut. 11:1–7)

God disciplined both Egypt and Israel, but note the difference: God’s discipline for Egypt resulted in their destruction; his discipline for Israel resulted in their instruction. God punished individuals in Israel to purge evil from Israel. God also punished the whole people, but through that discipline he taught them to trust and obey. God spoke to them his ten commandments to “discipline” them, to conform their lives to his will (Deut. 4:36). He tested them in the wilderness, providing for them as only he could, so they would trust only in him (Deut. 8:1–4). The lesson? “Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you” (Deut. 8:5).

God disciplines his people so that they learn not to rely on themselves and run after other gods, but to seek all and find all in him.

3. The Mosaic Covenant: Discipline to Avert Destruction

God led his people to the Promised Land, drove out their enemies, and established them there. In the covenant God made with Israel through Moses at Sinai, he made them not only a people but a nation (Exod. 19:5–6). He gave them a law that was meant not only to secure their obedience but to govern their society. Under the Mosaic covenant, God held Israel accountable to this law, and he authorized the human

government of Israel to inflict fitting sanctions for covenant defection. False prophets were to be put to death (Deut. 13:1–5), as were idolaters (Deut. 13:6–18; 17:2–7). God’s goal in authorizing the people to execute idolaters was to “purge the evil [or “evil person”] from your midst.” God ordered Israel to surgically remove the cancer of idolatry so that it would not metastasize and prove fatal.

In the Mosaic covenant God also employed other means of discipline. If the people failed to obey, he threatened disease and defeat (Lev. 26:14–17). If they failed to repent, God promised the further “discipline” of blighting their land and breaking their strength (Lev. 26:18–20). And other, more horrific consequences lay in wait if the people persisted in rebellion (Lev. 26:21–39; see “discipline” in vv. 23, 28).

All this discipline was designed to avert the disaster of exile. God disciplined his people in order to offer them a lifeline out of a still greater judgment.

To sum up where Israel stood under the Mosaic covenant: God gathered his people together. He brought them to a place he had prepared for them and planted them there (Exod. 15:17). He dwelled among them in his tabernacle, and later in his temple (Exod. 29:45–46; 40:34–38; 1 Kgs. 8:10–12). He walked among them (Lev. 26:12).

Sound familiar? It should. Israel was a new Adam, in a new Eden, with a new shot at obedience and lasting, intimate fellowship with God.

[To Be Continued Next Weekend]

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*This Sunday’s Sermon:
Matthew 18:15–20*

Bobby
Jamieson



Monday, July 21

Read: Jonah 1–2

Through the centuries many have jeered at Jonah as being a “whale of a tale,” but the Bible presents the short book of Jonah as being absolutely true. 2 Kings 14:25 references Jonah in the same manner it mentions many other historical prophets, and Jesus speaks of Jonah as a real historical figure in Matthew 12:39–41. This rebellious prophet really lived and really received the word of the Lord. He was given three crisp commands: Rise. Go. Call Out. Jonah arose, not to call out to Nineveh but to flee to Tashish. Jonah’s trajectory is clear: as he runs from God, he goes down. Down to Joppa. Down into the boat. Down lower into the deck of the boat where he lays down. Jonah’s location reflects his spiritual condition.

While Jonah is described as a rebellious prophet quickly going down, notice how wondrously sovereign is Yahweh. Jonah wants to flee the presence of God but finds it impossible. Yahweh is sovereign over the great wind. Yahweh is sovereign over the great storm. He is sovereign over the lots. He is sovereign over the great fish. You can’t read this little book and escape the all-powerful bigness of God.

Notice also the evangelistic thread in the first two chapters of Jonah. The prophet is supposed to preach a message of repentance which implies the opportunity for salvation. Jonah is unwilling to take this message to Nineveh. Jonah knows they might actually repent! The man of God is the most distant from God in the narrative. The pagan sea captain urges Jonah to pray. The pagan sailors are willing to turn to Yahweh when Jonah is not. Here is the great irony. The prophet was unwilling to take the name of Yahweh and his message to Nineveh. But in his unwillingness to obey God, he reveals the identity of God to these sailors. They now know the name of Yahweh because of Jonah, and they are willing to pray to him even when Jonah is not. They show compassion for Jonah’s life when he was unwilling to show compassion on the lives of the Ninevites. At the end of chapter one, the mission field seems to be worshipping Yahweh while the missionary sinks even further down. He is hurled into the sea where God’s appointed fish swallows the reluctant prophet.

The prophet’s prayer is actually saturated with knowledge of Scripture, especially the Psalms. Jonah’s prayer crescendoes with the message he was unwilling to take to Nineveh: salvation belongs to Yahweh. If Jonah gets a second chance, will he now obey? Will you take the gospel message to others or will you run from God?

God is so gracious to give second chances. The rebellious prophet repented, and Yahweh gives him a second opportunity to obey. The command has not changed: Arise. Go. Call out. God has given a second chance, but he is still demanding complete obedience. There is no opportunity for Jonah to change or soften the message. He survived the great storm and the great fish, but will he survive the great city? Nineveh was known for its exceeding violent wickedness and its worthless worship. History tells us that the royal city of Assyria had experienced great political and social upheaval along with natural disasters that surely primed the people to be open to hearing from God. Like the wicked cities of our day and our own neighborhoods, the only question is whether someone will take the gospel message to them.

This time Jonah obeys. He arose, he went, and he preached. We're only told the simple overview of his message, and yet we're told the people repented and believed. They said "Amen" to Jonah's sermons, and a great revival broke out in Nineveh. Even the pagan king repents and leads the nation in turning to God. The king sounds like the captain of the ship Jonah fled on: "Who knows, God may turn and relent." In his gracious mercy, God does indeed relent because Nineveh did indeed repent. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:41 that Nineveh's repentance was genuine.

Real repentance and conversion in the congregation is what faithful preachers long to see. Not Jonah. He is exceedingly, extremely angry. Jonah's heart is revealed in his response to Nineveh's repentance. He essentially says he would rather die than be the instrument of God's compassion to Nineveh. He sits outside the city hoping that perhaps judgment will still come on the city. The sovereign God is still at work in Jonah as Yahweh appoints a plant, a worm, and a wind to reveal the sad state of Jonah's soul.

The book ends as dramatically as it began. We're not given a satisfying conclusion to the story. We're forced to put ourselves in the place of Jonah. Where is our Nineveh? Do we actually want to see people repent and know Christ? Nineveh's repentance should be convicting to Israel. If the pagan nation turns to God, shouldn't the set apart nation turn to God? Yet, as we will soon see, Israel's rebellion is only growing and they will soon fall. What about us? Will we rebel like Jonah? God doesn't promise second chances for obedience. We should obey him today. In what areas of your life are you knowingly rebelling against God?

Wednesday, July 23

Read: Psalms 66–68

Psalm 66 God always keeps his promises. He keeps his promises to all his people, and he keeps his promises to you. Psalm 66 is a joyful psalm that celebrates and gives thanks to God for all of his mighty works. Come and see the works of God! The psalm begins by declaring the world-wide praise of God, but then it begins to focus on God's particular people. Like so many times in Scripture, the Bible points back to the exodus as a benchmark example of God's salvation. In verse 6, the psalmist points back to the crossing of the Red Sea as an example of God's sovereignty and salvation which should result in joy for his people. God preserved his people through many trials—many dangers, toils, and snares—and brought his people into a place of abundance. The psalm shifts from the group to the individual in verse 13. God has been faithful to his people, but he is also faithful to the individual person. How has God been faithful to you? Are you busy proclaiming the good news of Christ? Can you join with the psalmist in verse 16 and say, "Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will recount what He has done for my soul"?

Psalm 67 This short psalm is a wonderful prayer for the blessing of God. Verse 1 calls back to the great blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6:24–26: "May the Lord bless you and keep you and cause his face to shine upon you . . ." The blessing of God results in praises from the people of God. How many times in the New Testament do we see this same idea expressed in greetings like "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? God's benediction upon us—his blessing—empowers us to proclaim his name to the ends of the earth.

Psalm 68 We're not told the occasion for David's rich celebration of God's care for his people, but the text is full of prayer and praise. God scatters his enemies which causes his people to rejoice (1–3). God is worthy of praise and song, particularly because of his care for the vulnerable and helpless (4–6). The history of God's faithfulness in the past should spur his people on to trust him in the present (7–10). The Lord has victory over his enemies (11–14). God is present among his people, pictured at that time through the sanctuary but ultimately pictured through Christ (15–18; see Eph 4:8). God daily bears the burdens of his people, which will include both Jew and Gentile. The kings of the earth will one day praise him. Blessed be God!

King Uzziah reigned over fifty years in Judah, beginning at the age of 16. He followed in the good steps of his father Amaziah before him. He was helped by an otherwise unknown prophet named Zechariah (not to be confused with the prophet we met in chapter 24 or the prophet who wrote the book in Scripture). The text begins by telling of Uzziah's victories. His fame is well-deserved, for he built a great army and made great structural improvements to the nation. Sadly, the problem that has plagued mankind since the garden is revealed in the heart of the king: the sin of pride. We would say that Uzziah has much to be proud of with his earthly achievements, and yet he attempted to seize authority that he did not have.

To put it simply, King Uzziah is a king and not a priest. The king had no right to offer incense before a holy God. This was the work of the priests. 80 priests attempted to tell the king this very thing, but Uzziah would not be stopped. The chief priest Azariah gives the king an opportunity to repent and not offer this sinful sacrifice, but in the midst of his angry response God judges the king. The Lord could have killed Uzziah on the spot as he did with Nadab, Abihu, Uzzah and others. In his mercy the Lord punishes the king with leprosy. Oh dear reader, be reminded of the seriousness of sin. Don't tempt the mercy of God.

Uzziah would not submit to the priests as king, so he now must submit to the priests as a leper. This long history of kings began with a son of David who built the house of God, but now this son of David cannot even enter the house of God. We need the perfect Son of David to welcome us into the household of God lest we meet the fate of Uzziah.

Other acts of Uzziah's reign are given in the works of Isaiah, but not the book we have in Scripture. We do see Uzziah make an appearance in the Book of Isaiah, but it is an appearance in death. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah had a vision of Jesus Christ in the temple. The cleansing that Uzziah needed was the same cleansing that Isaiah needed, and it is the same cleansing that we need today. We must be cleansed by the true King. Once Isaiah had his sins covered by Christ, he was ready to hear from the Lord and serve him. May we come once again and be cleansed by the King, so that we might be sent out to serve him.

Friday, July 25

Read: Psalms 69–70

God's Word is amazing. **Psalm 69** was written by a suffering yet sinful man, as David makes plain about himself in verse 5. Yet so much of the text points forward to the sinless suffering servant Jesus Christ. A thousand years before our Lord was crucified at Calvary, God's people were given a glimpse into the agony of their eternal king through the agony of their earthly king.

David protests that he has not wronged the enemies who are attacking him. He says they hate him without cause, and we saw that happen more than once in David's life. The Apostle John tells us that Jesus saw David's situation ultimately as a prophecy of our Lord's own innocent suffering. He was truly hated without cause, yet the hatred that nailed Jesus to the cross was part of the predetermined plan of God to bring about our salvation.

The psalmist associates his suffering with his faithfulness to God. David is so closely identified with the Lord that the reproach he is facing is because his enemies are really bringing reproach upon God. In verse 9, David says that he is eaten up with passionate concern for the worship of God. "Zeal for Your house has consumed me," he says. Jesus's disciples would later realize that these words were perfectly pictured in the Lord's actions in the temple (Jn 2:17). Out of zeal for his Father's house, Jesus drove out the moneychangers and the ones selling animals there in the temple. He had watched until he could watch no more. He was consumed with the purity of his Father's house. Just as David could no longer tolerate the compromise and hypocrisy of the people of God, Jesus could not stand the corruption of his Father's house of prayer, and he drove out the offenders.

In verses 19–21 the psalmist confides to God that even in his deepest despair, he found no comfort from friends. They gave him no sympathy, but instead only gave him bitter food and drink. What may have been a word picture for the writer became reality for Christ on the cross. He was offered bitter gall, a poisonous herb, to eat. He was given vinegar to drink. Food that didn't nourish his life and a drink that did not quench his thirst. This is what was given to the Bread of Life and the Living Water as he died to give us life and nourish our souls. Isn't God's Word amazing to give us such a confident prayer of a suffering sinner like David? Isn't God's Word amazing to give us such a vivid picture of Christ?

Weekend Devotion: A Biblical Theology of Church Discipline

4. Exile: Discipline as Retribution, for Restoration

But Israel missed their shot. Over the course of hundreds of years, over the warnings of dozens of prophets, the people persistently rejected God and refused his will. So God eventually enforced the sanctions of the covenant, first on Israel in the north, then Judah in the south (see Lev. 26; Deut. 28; 2 Kgs. 17:1–23; 25:1–21).

Because Israel refused to trust and worship and obey God, God imposed on them a kind of capital sentence (Lev. 28:38; Deut. 4:27). He banished them. He drove them away east, out of his land and away from his presence.

The prophet Jeremiah describes the punishment of exile as discipline. This punishment is retributive, yes, but it also aims at recovery:

Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with you to save you, declares the Lord; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished. (Jer. 30:10–11; cf. 46:28)

Israel and Judah's exile is punishment, just and measured (cf. Hos. 7:12; 10:10). Yet its aim is not destruction, but restoration. God will devastate the nations that hosted his scattered people, but his own people still have this hope: "I am with you to save you." Like God cast down Pharaoh yet both redeemed and chastised his people, here God promises destruction for the nations yet deliverance through discipline for his people.

Ephraim cries out in exile, "You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for you are the Lord my God" (Jer. 31:18). And God will answer that prayer.

God promises full and final destruction to the nations that disregard him. Yet God disciplines his people with the devastation of exile in order to restore them again to fellowship with him, to repentance, to holiness. But how?

5. New Covenant, New Power, New Discipline

The Mosaic covenant demanded obedience but did not provide the power to obey. The new covenant would:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the

house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:31–34; cf. 32:37–41; Isa. 54:13; Ezek. 11:16–20; 36:22–36; 37:15–28; 39:25–29)

What the law couldn't do, the new covenant will: ensure the wholehearted obedience of God's whole people.

How is this new covenant enacted? Through the atoning death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the life-giving gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The new covenant gives new power. God's people are now a new people, reborn and indwelt by the empowering Holy Spirit. God's people now genuinely and characteristically, albeit imperfectly, reflect God's glory to the nations.

This new covenant with new power also comes with new discipline. God still disciplines his people through persecution and hard providences, weaning us from the world and tightening our grip on his promises (Heb. 12:5–11). God still chastises his people for sin, even to the point of inflicting death (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor. 11:27–31). The purpose, as before, is that by heeding God's discipline now we will ultimately escape judgment then: "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

But he also provides new means for preserving his people's purity. In addition to the internal supply of the Spirit, God provides the external support of the church's accountability. Now, those who claim to be God's people but whose lives contradict that claim are warned, entreated, pleaded with, and, if necessary, excluded from membership in the church (Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:1–13; 2 Cor. 2:5–8; Titus 3:10–11).

Under the new covenant, idolaters aren't executed but excluded. The church wields the power of the keys, not the sword. And, as with God's discipline of Israel in the desert, in their land, and in the exile, the goal is not destruction but repentance and restoration. Paul does call exclusion from the church a "punishment" (2 Cor. 2:6). But this punishment aims at transformation: renewed repentance and therefore renewed fellowship with God and God's people.

We should not miss the connection between the newness of the covenant and this new form of discipline.

The New Testament teaching on church discipline presupposes that the members of the church profess faith in Christ, and that their lives typically bear out that claim. When someone's life fundamentally undermines their profession, the New Testament answer isn't, "Well, the church is a mixed body. Believers and unbelievers will be in the church together, like the wheat and the tares, until the final judgment."

The field in which believers and unbelievers remain together until judgment is not the church but the world (Matt. 13:38). Church discipline doesn't simply protect the purity of the church; it presupposes the purity of the church. That is, the New Testament's teaching on discipline presupposes that the church is to be composed of those who credibly profess faith in Christ: those who say they trust in Jesus and whose lives, to the best of our ability to discern, confirm rather than contradict that claim.

6. Consummation: No More Discipline, but a Final Divide

Until Christ returns, we live in the in-between. God's people are empowered by his new covenant to trust his promises and obey his commands—but not yet perfectly. God's churches should be composed of people who credibly confess Christ—and yet some professors prove false (1 John 2:19).

But on that final day, God's people will need no more discipline. We will see Christ face to face, and we will be like him (1 John 3:1–2). God's discipline of his people now—whether the formative discipline of teaching and training, the corrective discipline of rebuke or exclusion, or the providential discipline of persecution and hardship—all aims at our conformity to Christ, which will one day be perfected. God's discipline of his people throughout history has always aimed at their restoration and transformation, and one day that transformation will be complete.

But on that day God will also enact a final division. He will effect an irreversible exclusion. Just as Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, just as Israel was exiled from their land, so all who do not trust in and follow Christ, all who persist in sin, will be excluded from God's new creation, forever:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Rev. 22:14–15)

Lessons Learned

What does this story of God's disciplinary dealings with his people teach us? Of many lessons that could be drawn I select three.

First, on this side of final judgment, every act of divine discipline is intended to reform and renew his people. This side of final judgment, no judgment is final.

Throughout God's long and twisting history with his often-wayward people, he has often deployed discipline in an effort to stun us out of sinful stupor. The goal every time was repentance and spiritual renovation. Similarly, when we exclude someone from church membership we are not pronouncing their final fate, but warning them of what it could be. To exclude someone from membership is not to pronounce their final condemnation but to seek to avert it. When we exclude someone, we must continue to work and pray and hope for their repentance, renewal, and restoration.

Second, even in disciplining his people, God distinguishes between them and the world. In Jeremiah God promises the nations a full end; he promises his people a new beginning. That's a temporal forecast of eternal destinies. All who oppose God will meet the "full end" of eternal punishment; all who trust in Christ will experience the eternal new beginning of the new creation.

Third, God "disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). God's discipline is good for us; it aims at a good far greater than what we often settle for. We constantly need reminding that hard providences do not mean God has a hard heart. If God uses hard measures, we should look to our hard hearts as the targets, not accuse God. Only a jackhammer will split concrete.

Love is not always nice, kindness is not always indulgent, and tolerance is not always a virtue. "No" is often the most loving thing a parent or pastor or church can say. And if that no goes unheeded, then it is not cruel but loving to follow God's own example, and obey God's own instructions, by disciplining someone now, in hope that they may be saved on the last day.

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This Sunday's Sermon:
Matthew 18:21–35

Bobby
Jamieson



RAMAH MONTHLY

Hymn of the Month

“I Know That My Redeemer Lives”

Penned by Samuel Medley in 1775, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives” testifies to the confidence of a believer grounded in Scripture. Medley, a former sailor turned Baptist pastor, was known for his gospel-focused hymns. This particular version pairs Medley’s text with a 19th-century American folk tune and refrain, emphasizing not only the truth of Christ’s resurrection but the joy it brings to those who believe.

Each stanza of the hymn proclaims the living Christ and the hope secured in him. The opening lines echo Job 19:25, affirming the believer’s confidence in the risen Redeemer. “What comfort this sweet sentence gives” reflects the peace found in knowing that Christ has conquered death (John 14:19). The refrain—“Shout on, pray on, we’re gaining ground”—urges perseverance, rooted in the gospel’s triumph (1 Cor 15:57), while the final line echoes Luke 15:24: “The dead’s alive and the lost is found.”

The second stanza proclaims Christ as “my ever-lasting Head” (Eph 1:22), exalting him as both risen and reigning. In the third stanza, Christ is active on our behalf: He blesses, loves, and intercedes (Rom 8:34). The final stanza lifts the heart in worship: “He lives, my Jesus, still the same” (Heb 13:8), a reminder that our hope is grounded in an unchanging Savior.

As we sing, we do so with joy and conviction. Our Redeemer lives—so we pray, we praise, and we press on with confidence. Glory, hallelujah!

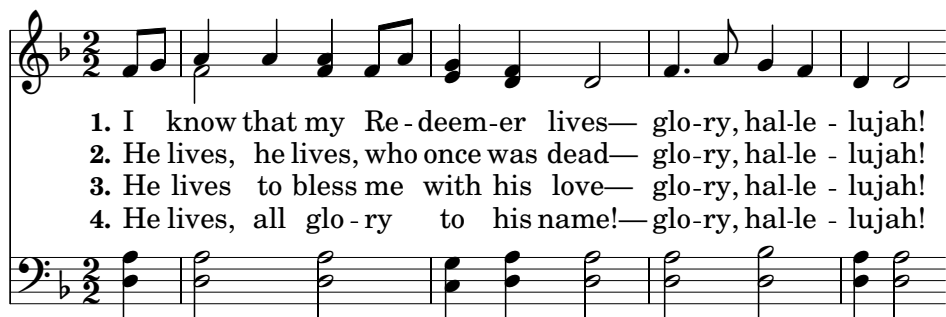
~Pastor Laramie



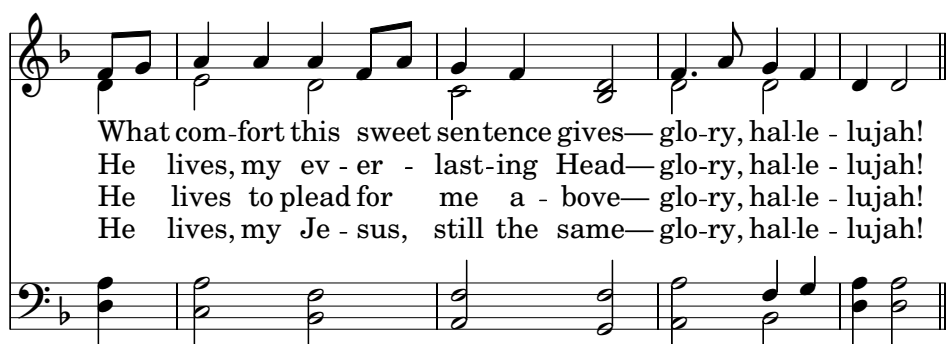
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I Know That My Redeemer Lives

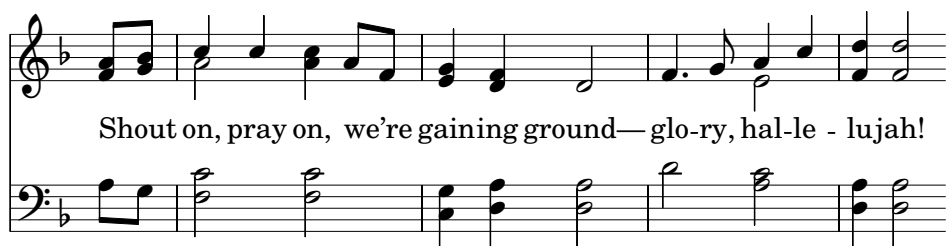
SHOUT ON



1. I know that my Re-deem-er lives— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!
2. He lives, he lives, who once was dead— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!
3. He lives to bless me with his love— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!
4. He lives, all glo-ry to his name!— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!



What com-fort this sweet sentence gives— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!
He lives, my ev - er - last-ing Head— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!
He lives to plead for me a - bove— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!
He lives, my Je - sus, still the same— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!



Shout on, pray on, we're gaining ground— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!



The dead's a - live and the lost is found— glo-ry, hal-le - lujah!

Words: Samuel Medley, 1775
Music: American folk hymn, 1990

CM with refrain

Weekly Calendar at Ramah

Sundays:

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.

Worship Service: 11:00 a.m.

Equipping the Saints: 5:00 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Prayer Meeting: 5:45pm



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