

RAMAH MONTHLY



*a monthly devotional
for Ramah Baptist Church*

June 2025
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 cover the end of David's life, the reign of Solomon, and the downfall of Israel. God has so much to teach us from the high and low moments in the text. We trust there is much encouragement as well as conviction along the way.

The weekend devotionals generally relate to the Christian life as well as including an excerpt from our summer reading club title, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis.

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 of 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 2

Read: 2 Samel 20; Psalm 25

We expect to see a general progression in the Christian life. Never perfection but a general trend towards more maturity rather than a reversal towards ungodliness. Isn't it disappointing when older saints do not seem to still be walking in the righteousness they once enjoyed? The boldness of David's youth has become sinfully passive in later years. David is not the man he once was. The formerly decisive, commanding warrior has been replaced by an ineffective leader who seems to have no command of his top warriors.

Chapter 19 ended with the hint of civil war in the land. Chapter 20 sees that division beginning to be set in motion by a worthless man named Sheba. The books of Samuel have been punctuated by worthless men along the way including Eli's sons and Nabal. Sheba fits right in as he leads many away from following their king. David calls Amasa into service, but Amasa is unable to get the job done in time. Remember that Amasa was Absalom's general whom David promoted over Joab after Absalom's death in order to win favor with the northern tribes who are starting to rebel. David now turns to Joab's brother Abishai for help. Abishai and Joab often fought together in battle. Should David be surprised that the power-grabbing Joab so quickly re-enters the story? In a move that reminds us of Ehud assassinating the fat king Eglon back in Judges 3, Joab hides a sword in order to kill his rival Amasa. Many wicked men have been willing to kill for power, and Joab is no different. He does eventually yield to the wisdom of this wise woman in Abel. With his competition dead, Joab is back in command of Israel's army and seems to be in command of Israel's king. The nation may not be fully divided but it's hardly united. Will David ever be able to control his general?

2 Samuel 21–24 serves as an epilogue to the book. The chronological action of David's reign ends here. It will be picked up in 1 Kings, but think about how far we've come in God's big story here in the books of Samuel. The two-volume book began with no king in Israel and everyone doing what was right in their own eyes. The book ends with a king on the throne, a king who has had some glorious victories but also scandalous sin that has ripped apart his family and is ripping apart the nation. Israel needs a king greater than David. How many sins portrayed in the books of Samuel do you see in your own heart? Are you still progressing in the Christian life? Turn to the greater David for victory over sin.

How do you evaluate the long reign of David? The narrator of Samuel has given us the final four chapters to help flesh out the complicated picture. At the heart of the section you have poetry reflecting the man after God's own heart. On the outer edges of the epilogue you have darker scenes, with today's reading being perhaps the darkest. Even after diligent study, we still have questions about what we read in 2 Samuel 21:1–14.

We don't know when this event falls in the chronology of David's reign, but a three year famine has certainly caught the attention of the king and his people. Unlike Saul before him, David knows what to do—he prays. Without the clear revelation of God, David (nor the reader) would have any understanding of how to interpret the situation. God's Word guides us to correctly understand reality.

The Bible does not tell us when Saul murdered a group of Gibeonites, but Yahweh tells David that this sin from years ago is bringing consequences upon the people today. You may remember the Gibeonites from Joshua 9. They made a covenant with Joshua and the nation by pretending to be from far away when they were actually nearby enemies. Joshua honored the covenant. Saul dishonored the covenant. It's up to David to honor the covenant again. The Gibeonites are allowed to name the appropriate restitution from this sin of years gone by. Verses 4 and 5 seem to suggest that money or land would have been sufficient, but the Gibeonites harshly demand blood. They say they want to hang the men before Yahweh, but they misunderstand the character of God. The death of these sons of Saul will not appease God in the sense that he will now be happy and end the famine. The Gibeonites talk about hanging the seven men before Yahweh, but they don't know God's Word well enough to know they shouldn't be left hanging overnight. They should have been buried, and yet their bodies are left exposed for days. God does end the famine and send rain, but we shouldn't assume that God was submitting to a pagan idea of justice. God responds to the prayers for the land after David's honorable actions, not after the Gibeonites' dishonorable demand. The multiple scenes of war in the rest of the chapter show that God is still with David in a way that he wasn't with Saul.

While we still have questions about the text, this much is clear: Saul had broken the covenant. David is faithful towards the covenant. Saul's sin impacted the nation for years to come, but God faithfully responded to the faithfulness of his people.

Wednesday, June 4

Read: 1 Chronicles 21; Psalm 27

As we've already noticed, the epilogue of 2 Samuel 21–24 is bracketed by negative scenes in David's life. 1 Chronicles 21 is a parallel passage with 2 Samuel 24. Comparing them causes us to wrestle with big questions about God. 1 Chronicles 21 tells us that Satan stood up against Israel, but 2 Samuel 24:1 tells us that God incited David against Israel. What is going on? Is God causing David to sin? Is God using Satan for his own purposes?

2 Samuel 24:1 sheds more light on the matter when it says, "Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel." How did God often bring punishment upon Israel when they sinned? By using adversary nations as his instrument of punishment against them. The Chronicles passage suggests that there was an adversary involved, but perhaps it was The Adversary. You may remember that the Hebrew word "satan" means adversary. So, whether God sovereignly is using an adversarial enemy nation generally against Israel or is using the individual Satan specifically, God is using this entire matter as a test and eventually a judgment upon David.

For modern readers living in a nation that regularly takes a census of the people, David's action may not seem noteworthy. When considering that he is preparing for war against an adversary, his actions might make perfect human sense. But as we see in the text, that's not the whole story. David's census is not merely wise war planning. David seems to be pridefully drawing strength from military might and not from Yahweh. Both accounts stress that even Joab recognizes this census is a bad idea! It was abominable to Joab and displeasing to God. Eventually David recognizes his own sin and repents to God. The Lord allows David to choose his own judgment, and the king entrusts himself to the faithful God instead of unfaithful people.

In a dramatic scene, after 70,000 people have died, the angel of Yahweh is about to destroy the city of Jerusalem when suddenly God demands the destroying angel to halt destruction. As David sees this angel suspended between heaven and earth, he intercedes for the people and pleads to take the sins of the people upon himself. It later becomes clear in 2 Chronicles 3:1 that this is the exact location of Mount Moriah where Abraham had prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It will soon become the location of Solomon's temple. While David can't take the sins of the people on himself, the day will soon come when the greater David will hang between heaven and earth near this very site as he alone makes the perfect sacrifice taking our sins upon himself.

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God's promises are trustworthy and true, even when we're not sure how things will all come together. The Lord had promised David through Nathan the prophet that one of David's sons would be raised up to the throne that would last forever. This promise did not pass away even after David's grievous sin with Bathsheba. This promise did not pass away even after all of the bloodshed that has ripped apart David's family throughout the last portion of 2 Samuel. God's promise still stands, but the reader has to wonder how it will all come together.

The scene begins with aged David being so feeble and cold that he needs a young virgin to provide body heat to keep him warm. Whichever son of David takes the throne, it doesn't seem likely that the king is going to be to give much guidance to the process. Enter Adonijah. He seems to be the oldest living son of David which makes him the natural candidate for the job. Like big brother Absalom before him, Adonijah begins to make preparations to present him as the new king. He also seems to have all of the warning signs that also marked his rebellious, now deceased, brother. Adonijah is even picking up key supporters in Joab and Abiathar the priest.

On the other side of the story stands another remarkable group. Bathsheba is no longer known as the wife of Uriah (which would be a reminder of her sin) but is noted as the mother of Solomon. She has taken a place of honor in the household. There stands Nathan the prophet, whom the Lord used to bring David to his knees in repentance. And there is Solomon himself, waiting in the wings to be king. Both Bathsheba and Nathan inform David of Adonijah's actions and how they threaten David's promise that Solomon would be king. David is a shell of the man he once was, but he still clings to the promises of God. He gives them just the right plan to overcome Adonijah's attempted coup, and it works. Solomon is made king! Everyone hears the news, even the people at Adonijah's coronation party. They recognize Solomon's authority and abandon the half-brother of the new king. Trying to protect his own life, Adonijah seeks sanctuary at the altar, but Solomon is gracious, giving him an opportunity to cease his rebellion and live as a worthy subject.

Adonijah is not a worthy example in his rebellion. Yet, we can emulate Adonijah in this way: take hold of the true altar, the greater temple, the greater Solomon—Jesus Christ. Through King Jesus we can know the peace that King Solomon could only point towards.

Friday, June 6

Read: 1 Kings 2; Proverbs 14

What advice could a father give his son on his deathbed? What advice would a king give his son, the new king, on his deathbed? David charges Solomon to be strong and manly, that is, to keep the Word of Yahweh. David knows the promises of God are trustworthy and he exhorts his son to walk in sincere faithfulness before the Lord. That is the preeminent counsel David gives, and it is good counsel for any daughter or son. But David also gives Solomon some practical advice on how to establish the throne and avoid any challenges, particularly from those who challenged David during his reign. The rogue warrior Joab must be dealt with. The cursing Shimei must be dealt with as well. Loyal Barzillai must be treated loyally. With these instructions delivered, David goes the way of all the earth. After 40 years on the throne, he dies.

Challenges to the throne quickly come to Solomon. Adonijah sneakily tries to reclaim the throne once again. Going to Solomon's mother Bathsheba, Adonijah seems to be asking for help in securing a bride. He is actually trying to use the young woman Abishag as a pawn in his battle for the throne. As we saw with Absalom in 2 Samuel 16:20–22, to take possession of a member of the king's harem is a wicked attempt to claim the throne for yourself. Bathsheba may not have recognized Adonijah's betrayal, but Solomon certainly does. He sees right through the ploy and ensures that Adonijah will die for his rebellion just like Absalom before him. As for the priest who supported Adonijah, Solomon spares his life but fulfills God's will that the house of Eli would no longer be allowed to serve in the priesthood. Then there's Joab. Joab attempts to seek sanctuary at the altar like Adonijah had, but Joab isn't leaving the altar. God provided refuge at the altar for the accidental offender (see Exodus 21:14) but that certainly doesn't describe Joab. Joab may underestimate Solomon, but the king sees that justice prevails. Joab is slain upon the altar and buried. For the final foe Shimei, wise Solomon gives him an opportunity to live essentially under house arrest. When Shimei can't live up to those terms, he too is executed.

The kingdom is firmly established in the hands of Solomon. His father had often faced challenges to the throne, but Solomon avoids that. The Lord has raised up Solomon and is bringing about a throne that will last forever. The Lord has also executed justice, even to those who thought they had escaped the justice of Yahweh. Neither will we escape his judgment if we reject the one greater than Solomon.

There is still more good news. In Galatians 4:4-5 Paul wrote, “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” By redeeming us from the curse of the Law, Jesus opened the way for us to inherit the blessing of obedience to it, blessings that He earned for us by His own perfect obedience.

Here the blessing is identified as “the full rights of sons.” The reference is to the status of sons who have advanced from their minority to that of full-grown young adults. Thus we have been redeemed from a cell on death row and have been brought into God’s family as fully adopted sons, with all the privileges included in that status. Think of what this would mean on a human level. Here sits a man on death row, convicted of heinous crimes. He is in solitary confinement twenty-three hours a day. All legal appeals to spare him have been exhausted, and his impending execution looms nearer every day.

Suddenly the cell door is flung open, and the judge who sentenced him stands there with a full pardon in his hand. But he carries more than a mere pardon. He also carries papers of adoption into his own family. The judge who sentenced this man to die has now adopted him as his own son. This death-row inmate is not just put out on the street with a cheap suit of clothes and a hundred dollars. No, he is taken into the home of the judge himself and provided with all the love and care the judge lavishes on his own children.

But the good news keeps getting better. We truly did live on God’s eternal “death row.” As Paul wrote in Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death” — physical and eternal death. That’s where we were — on death row. As believers we know that we have been delivered from eternal death, but we still face the prospect of physical death. That is not the final word, however. In the same letter Paul wrote that “we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). This means our redemption from the curse of the Law and adoption into God’s family will reach its ultimate fulfillment at the Resurrection, when we receive our immortal bodies and dwell forever in the immediate presence of the Lord. We will explore these blessings in greater detail in chapter 14, but we must consider one more issue now.

Let’s pursue the story of the death-row criminal who is not only pardoned but adopted into the judge’s family. Would you want to be a member of that family as they welcomed this murderer into their home? Suppose he had been convicted as a serial killer who bludgeoned his victims to death.

Would you sleep peacefully in your bed at night, or would you want to lock and bar your door before going to bed? Regardless of the change in the man's legal status, we obviously would be apprehensive, wondering if we might be his next victim. We would all agree that this man needs not only a change of legal status but also a change of heart. We don't want to sleep in the same house with a serial killer.

Once again we reach the limitations of human illustrations. The judge who brings the pardon and who adopts this murderer into his family cannot change this man's heart. But God can and does change our hearts. God promises to take away our hearts of stone that are spiritually dead and unresponsive to Him and give us hearts of flesh that are spiritually alive and responsive to Him (see Ezekiel 36:26). God changes not only our legal status, but our hearts as well. To go back to the illustration, we no longer have the heart of a serial killer. This, too, is part of our redemption that Jesus secured for us.

In the story of redemption, deliverance from the penal curse of the Law is the major part of the story, but it is not the whole story. The apostle Peter wrote that "you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your fore-fathers" (1 Peter 1:18). The empty way of life is the life we lived without Christ. Regardless of whether it was a decent life or a wicked life judged on a human scale of morality, it was a vain, futile, empty life. A good description of this empty life is found in Ephesians 2:2-3, where Paul describes us as having followed the ways of the world and of Satan, and of having continually gratified the cravings of our sinful natures. Christ's ransom, then, secured for us not only redemption from the penal curse of the Law, but also redemption from this bondage to sin. These two aspects of redemption always go together. Redemption from the curse infallibly secures redemption from the bondage.

The apostle Paul addressed this absolute connection between redemption from the curse of the Law and redemption from the bondage of sin when he wrote that Jesus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). Here we see that the design of Christ's redemptive work goes beyond salvation from God's everlasting curse. Its purpose is to redeem us from sin to Himself to be a people who desire to please Him.

Regarding this absolute connection between redemption from the guilt and

consequent curse of sin and the release from the dominion or reign of sin in our lives, noted New Testament scholar Leon Morris wrote, “It is wrong to separate the legal status, gained by complete discharge of the law against us, from the resultant life. The only redemption Paul knew was one in which they lived as those who had been adopted into the family of God.”

We have now seen yet another aspect of the unsearchable riches of Christ. We have been ransomed from death row, adopted into the Father’s family, and given new hearts so that our major bent is to live for Him. All this is set against the dark background of the curse of the Law for any disobedience, which of course affects us all. Just as the diamonds on a jeweler’s counter shine more brilliantly when set upon a dark velvet pad, so Christ’s redemptive work shines more brilliantly when contrasted with our sin and the consequent curse that was upon us.

The fact is, however, that even as believers we continue to sin even though we are no longer under its dominion. And when we sin—and even our best deeds are stained with sin—we do that which apart from Christ would call down God’s curse upon us. Our consciences know that and will continually bring accusations against us. Our only safe response is to plead guilty to those accusations without trying to minimize them. Having done that, we must go back to the gospel and remind ourselves that the curse of the Law no longer has a claim against us. And then in grateful response to what God has done for us in Christ, we set ourselves to put to death by the power of the Spirit those very sins of which our consciences condemn us. Only in this way can we continually glory in the cross and enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Excerpted from The Gospel for Real Life by Jerry Bridges.

Jerry
Bridges



This Sunday’s Sermon:
Biblical Foundations for
Family Worship

Monday, June 9

Read: 2 Chronicles 1; Proverbs 15

King David has died, and King Solomon has established his kingdom. Long live the king! But what kind of king will Solomon be? Yahweh promised David that from his seed would come a kingdom that will never end. Is Solomon the promised seed or is he part of God's plan to move his grand narrative forward?

As we continue in God's big story, our readings will sometimes alternate between the books of Kings and Chronicles. You may have wondered why God gave us both books since there seems to be much repetition between them. They are placed alongside one another in our English Bibles which increases our idea that one must be unnecessary, but they come from two different eras in Israel's history. Chronicles was composed later in Israel's history after the time known as "the exile." Don't worry, we'll get there in the story. The Chronicler (possibly Ezra) is helping that generation of Jews to see their history in light of everything that has happened to them. If God's covenant with David is so important, how did the nation wind up being taken out of the land as punishment? The Chronicler is writing from a positive, encouraging perspective to help that new generation press on in faithfulness. He doesn't gloss over Israel's sin or the sins of individual kings, but he is writing from a mostly positive perspective. Understanding this bit of background will help foster an appreciation for the oft-neglected book of Chronicles.

Just as his father David prioritized biblical worship, so does Solomon. From his deathbed David had told his son to walk in the ways of Yahweh, and now Solomon is leading the people to renew their worship of God according to God's commands. David had brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, but the tent of meeting was still in Gibeon. The new king worships Yahweh there at Gibeon. That very night God appears to Solomon and invites him to make a request of the Lord. David had emphasized to Solomon that he would need wisdom in his service as king, and Solomon heard the message loud and clear. He asks the Lord for wisdom, but God responds by saying that Solomon will be blessed with wisdom and much more. As the rest of the chapter begins to picture, God will bless Solomon with much material wealth along with great wisdom. We shouldn't expect that the Lord will bless us in the same way he blessed Solomon, but yet we can also seek wisdom:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

James 1:5 (LSB)

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When was the last time you read the blueprint for a building? Perhaps the home inventory on an insurance policy? Construction passages are the type of thing we try to avoid in our Bible reading, and yet God has given us so many texts about the construction of structures for his worship. It's almost like worship really matters to God.

David desired to build a house of worship for Yahweh, but God told him that his son would be the one to complete that task. Solomon is still new to the throne, but he prioritizes the worship of God. He begins a seven and a half year building project to construct the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem on the very threshing floor that David had bought from Ornan the Jebusite. Much of the temple imagery is also Garden of Eden imagery. The Creator is still moving us forward in the same story, God's big story.

The Chronicler actually doesn't tell us every building detail that he could have told us. He moves quickly to the Holy Place and then into the Holy of Holies. The Chronicler is focused on the very heart of worship, where sacrifices will be made to point forward to the one mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). The veil that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies) is a shadow of the day when Christ will be the perfect sacrifice upon the cross and the curtain will be torn in two from top to bottom. In fact, everything about the temple is ultimately pointing forward to Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14).

After moving rather quickly through the layout of the temple, the Chronicler slows down for the dedication ceremony of the temple. This is a worship service to remember, but before the service can begin everyone and everything must be in its place. Solomon assembles the leaders of the nation to oversee the movement of the ark of the covenant into the temple. The proper priests handle the ark according to God's instructions. A countless number of sheep and oxen are being sacrificed in worship to the Lord. The ark containing only the Ten Commandments is put into its proper place in the Holy of Holies. The singers begin to lift their voices in praise to God and his glory fills the temple in response to their worship. The dedication service is not over, but let us pause and reflect on the glory and goodness of God. The temple is only a foretaste. Jesus is far greater, and heaven will be far sweeter.

Wednesday, June 11

Read: 2 Chronicles 6–7

We continue worshipping in the service of dedication for the temple by Solomon and the people. The people draw near to God through the atonement he has commanded, God accepts the sacrifice, and they commune with him. This is the heart of true worship through Christ.

Solomon recognizes this has been one long story, going back at least to Egypt. Yahweh appeared in thick darkness in a cloud at Mount Sinai but now he will dwell among his people in the temple of Jerusalem. Solomon blesses the people by blessing the Lord who has kept every single promise. He has been with his people since Egypt and has not abandoned them. Even though David desired a noble thing in building the temple, God promised that Solomon would do it. God has kept his promises.

The sovereign king of Israel Solomon humbly bows before the sovereign king of all things, and he prays. When Solomon prays, his prayer is rooted in the covenant (or promise) of God. Solomon knows the character of God and prays accordingly. How can we pray this way? By knowing the character of God through the Word of God. We can pray all sorts of prayers in all sorts of circumstances (1 Tim 2:1–7) in much the same way Solomon does. Whether in the face of crime, attack, drought, famine, war, or sin (6:22–39), we can pray to the God whom heaven and earth can't contain (6:18). Chapter 6 ends with a plea for God to remember his covenant love to his people as represented in David, the servant of God. Remember that the Chronicler is telling all of these events to a much later generation than Solomon's generation. This is not the newspaper reporting yesterday's events, but a history book reporting the previous four centuries' events. This account is to encourage the people coming out of exile that God has not forgotten his covenant and he has not forgotten them. This ought to encourage us, too, for God has not changed.

A quick reading of the rest of chapter 7 might make us think that God's answer to Solomon's prayer was immediate. Verse 11 actually tips us off that much time actually passes. God appears to Solomon at night many years later just like he appeared at night at the beginning of his reign. God has heard the prayer that Solomon offered so many years before. Like the people coming out of exile, we might sometimes wonder if God hears our prayers, prayers that we offered so long ago. But the Chronicler is teaching us through Solomon that God indeed hears and answers prayers, on his own time table according to his perfect will.

When Solomon began his reign, he asked Yahweh for wisdom. The Lord said that he would indeed give Solomon wisdom, but also riches, honor, and glory. Both wisdom and wealth have been on display in our readings, but they seem to crescendo in 1 Kings 10. We're told of Solomon's great wealth—gold was overflowing and silver was so plentiful that it became common. The king's ivory throne overlaid with gold is flanked by symbols of authority—a dozen statues of lions. Solomon's economy is booming with worldwide commerce flowing through the land. People seem to be coming from the ends of the earth to honor Solomon and to seek his counsel. One Gentile woman in particular is spotlighted: the queen of Sheba. His reputation has reached her ears, and she comes to test him with hard questions. Riddles that would have stumped an ordinary man are no match for this wise king. The sights and sounds and tastes of the kingdom combined with the wisdom of the king leave this foreign queen speechless. The Queen of Sheba recognizes the blessings of Solomon, and she in turn blesses the God of Solomon. She praises Yahweh. Jesus mentions the queen in Matthew 12:42 and indicates that she truly converted to the one, true, and living God. How blessed is Solomon!

All of this makes Solomon's downfall all the more tragic. Notice the somber words of 11:1: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women." In 3:3 it was said that Solomon loved God. Now his love has changed. As we have watched his wealth and wisdom, we might have wondered about potential red flags along the way. Was the king actually piling up gold and horses and chariots in a way that would bring indictment from Deuteronomy 17:17? Those questions are fully answered in chapter 11. The gavel of condemnation falls in verse 3: his many wives turned his heart away. That's all you need to know, but then more details follow. His heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh. He did not follow Yahweh fully. Solomon is not like his father. Solomon's great gifting does not excuse his great sins. Just as God tore the kingdom from Saul (remember Samuel visually tearing Saul's robe), now God will tear the kingdom from Solomon. However, for the sake of God's promise to David, one tribe will remain under the leadership of Solomon's son. The kingdom will remain united in Solomon's lifetime, but the kingdom is on borrowed time. It will soon divide. The enemies in the rest of the chapter make that plain. Solomon soon sleeps in the grave and his reign is over, but God's promises are alive and well.

Friday, June 13

Read: 1 Kings 12–13

The Lord has declared what is about to take place in the kingdom of Israel; we watch the events unfold in 1 Kings 12–13. Jeroboam had been told by a prophet that the nation would be divided, and he would rule over 10 tribes. The soon-to-be king decided to wait in Egypt until Solomon actually died, but now is pleading for mercy before Solomon's son Rehoboam. Rehoboam's name means "one who enlarges the people" but he will sadly divide the people. We learn just how harsh things had been under Solomon's reign, but Rehoboam refuses the counsel of older, wiser, mature men and joins in the folly of younger men who direct him to be even harsher than Solomon. Rehoboam sounds a lot like Pharaoh in Egypt. He plans to increase the burden of the people, but they rebel and the nation divides. Only the tribe of Judah will unite behind the son of Solomon. Lest we think this is just incredibly poor statesmanship by Rehoboam, the text makes plain that Yahweh is bringing all of this about just as he had promised through the prophet Ahijah.

We will follow both the northern and southern kingdoms and their kings throughout the narrative. At times we will need to study hard to keep everyone straight and understand what is taking place. The ESV Study Bible is helpful in showing us what is going on in the Jeroboam story: "As Moses once led his people out from slavery under the Egyptian pharaoh, so Jeroboam now leads Israel out from 'slavery' under the house of David; but 'Jeroboam as Moses' is soon transformed into 'Jeroboam as Aaron' as he fashions golden calves for Israel to worship." Jeroboam knows that if he allows people to continue worshiping in Jerusalem, they will eventually desire to reunite with the tribe of Judah. He creates an alternate worship experience that is eerily similar to Aaron's golden calf. Jeroboam says he wants the people to continue worshiping the God who brought them out of Egypt, that is, Yahweh. But Jeroboam is introducing false worship because it's against the commands of Yahweh.

The unnamed prophet from Judah in chapter 13 announces God's judgment on these idolatrous golden calves. King Josiah will indeed one day tear down Jeroboam's high places. The prophet maintains his integrity before King Jeroboam but is tempted by a lying old prophet from Bethel. The same command the prophet quoted to Jeroboam should have been quoted to the lying prophet. Because God judged the disobedient unnamed prophet, God will certainly also judge Jeroboam and his false worship. But Jeroboam did not listen and increased the sin of the people, sin that will soon be judged.

Weekend Devotion: Mere Christianity

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

That is the key to history. Terrific energy is expended—civilisations are built up—excellent institutions devised; but each time something goes wrong. Some fatal flaw always brings the selfish and cruel people to the top and it all slides back into misery and ruin. In fact, the machine conks. It seems to start up all right and runs a few yards, and then it breaks down. They are trying to run it on the wrong juice. That is what Satan has done to us humans.

And what did God do? First of all He left us conscience, the sense of right and wrong: and all through history there have been people trying (some of them very hard) to obey it. None of them ever quite succeeded. Secondly, He sent the human race what I call good dreams: I mean those [strange] stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life again and, by his death, has somehow given new life to men. Thirdly, He selected one particular people and spent several centuries hammering into their heads the sort of God He was—that there was only one of Him and that He cared about right conduct. Those people were the Jews, and the Old Testament gives an account of the hammering process.

Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world, who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.

One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive

sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivalled by any other character in history.

Yet (and this is the strange, significant thing) even His enemies, when they read the Gospels, do not usually get the impression of silliness and conceit. Still less do unprejudiced readers. Christ says that He is 'humble and meek' and we believe Him; not noticing that, if He were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.



C.S.
Lewis

This Sunday's Sermon:
**Biblical Foundations for
being a Pro-Family Church**

Monday, June 16

Read: Proverbs 16–18

Proverbs can be convicting and challenging. Some seem hard to understand while others may be easy to understand but hard to put into practice. As we've seen before, the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs were generally longer sections, but the remainder of the book is noticeably marked by a variety of shorter proverbs. Sometimes themes can be noticed in larger sections. You might notice many proverbs related to relationships and family in chapters 17 and 18, while chapter 16 repeatedly emphasizes God's sovereignty over all things. Since we've been reading Psalms and Proverbs alongside our reading of the grand narrative of Scripture, it's easy to notice how many proverbs can be illustrated by some of our recent readings.

Proverbs 16:3 ("Commit your works to Yahweh, and your plans will be established.") reminds us of David's trusting the Lord while fleeing Saul and waiting to become king. He often had the opportunity to seize the throne by harming Saul, but he refused and instead committed his works to Yahweh. Does not Proverbs 16:4 ("Yahweh has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.") remind us of so many characters in recent readings? What about Ahithophel, Absalom, and Jeroboam? "For Yahweh had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that Yahweh might bring calamity on Absalom" (2 Sam 17:14b). Jeroboam "did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of events from Yahweh, that He might establish His word" (1 Kgs 12:15). God is sovereign over all, good and bad. Similarly, Saul, Absalom, and Rehoboam quickly come to mind when reading Proverbs 16:5, "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh; assuredly, he will not be unpunished." It's not that the meaning of the proverb is found in the lives of these men. We study proverbs in their context according to their genre just like we do any other part of Scripture. However, reading the proverbs parallel with our narrative reading certainly illustrates many proverbs in a memorable way. Proverbs 16:12 will play out in the text time and again throughout Kings and Chronicles: "It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for in righteousness a throne is established."

Solomon penned many of these proverbs. He was a man marked by God—given wisdom, yet how often did Solomon ultimately fail to heed his own advice? Let us hide God's wisdom deeply in our hearts, and pray for his strength that we wouldn't sin.

What do you do when you let over eighty percent of your kingdom slip away? Try to get it back! Rehoboam is the first king of Judah in this new era of the divided kingdom. He is going to model many things, both good and bad, that we will see repeated in the text in future readings. Our passage begins with Rehoboam trying to reunite the kingdom by force. He first prepares to fight the northern kingdom back into submission with the might of his own army. The Lord sends a prophet to make plain: do not attempt to reunite the kingdom. It is God's will for the kingdom to be divided.

Plan B for Rehoboam is to fortify many cities. He also benefits from the many Levites and priests from across the northern kingdom move to Jerusalem. They have been rejected by Jeroboam (who has set up his own priests) and desire to remain faithful to Yahweh. For three years the king and the kingdom of Judah enjoy the blessings of God because of their obedience to walk faithfully like David and Solomon. The family tree of Rehoboam reflects his shrewdness (but not godliness) in planning for future succession. All of the blessings Rehoboam enjoyed in the beginning of his reign could not make up for the unfaithfulness that began in the fourth year of his reign. By year five, Yahweh judged their unfaithfulness by the hand of Shishak of Egypt. It seems we're reverting to the era of the judges: the people sin, God judges them through an enemy nation, the people repent and cry out to the Lord, he delivers them, and eventually the cycle starts over. When the Lord sees the people humble themselves, he announces he will not destroy them but he will teach them a lesson. The reversion to the judges became a reverse exodus as the nation of Judah becomes slaves to Egypt.

Shishak lets the people live but he completely plunders Jerusalem including the palace and the temple. All of Solomon's wealth—gone. All the extraordinary material blessings of God poured out on Solomon's life are removed in one generation. What a reminder of how much we lose when we are unfaithful to the Lord.

The Chronicler emphasizes the repentance of Rehoboam. When he repented, the Lord showed mercy. The original audience needed to be reminded of that lesson, and so do we. The final assessment of Solomon's son is found in 12:14: Rehoboam was evil because he did not set his heart to seek Yahweh. Where is your heart set today? Are you seeking the Lord?

Wednesday, June 18

Read: 1 Kings 15–16; Proverbs 20

Israel's history seems to be moving at a breathtaking pace. We read two entire books devoted to the first two kings. Solomon received nearly a dozen chapters. The writer of Kings is picking up the pace to cover many kings in short amounts of space. The picture in the Southern Kingdom is bleak with only a few good kings. The picture in the Northern Kingdom is entirely dark with only evil kings. The narrator shifts back and forth between the kingdoms as history progresses, but the question will typically be: how much is this king like David?

Jeroboam's son is wicked just like his father, but there's one bright spot in Jerusalem: Asa. For the sake of his covenant with David, God raises up Abijam's son Asa who is faithful like his great-great grandfather. Asa tears down much (but not all) of the false worship in the land, even when it impacts his own mother. Asa reigned forty-one years in Judah, and his overall good reign was also marked by ongoing war with the Northern Kingdom.

The narrator shifts the focus back to the wicked kings in the Northern Kingdom. The rest of chapters 15 and 16 describe the increasing wickedness in the kings of Israel. We've seen how God will still bless the Southern Kingdom when the kings are faithful and for the sake of his promise to David. The rest of our reading shows just how dark things can become when the kings reject the Lord. Jeroboam's son Nadab and his evil reign are brought to an end by the murder that had been prophesied by the prophet Ahijah in chapter 14. Jeroboam's house is over. The new king of Israel (remember that's just referring to the Northern Kingdom right now) is Baasha, but he and his son Elah are wicked like the previous dynasty of Jeroboam. Their family reign does not last long when Zimri conspires against Elah and murders him. When a king is overthrown their family is always destroyed. Zimri does to the house of Baasha what Baasha had done to the house of Jeroboam. It sure feels like the story is going backwards. There's a king in Israel, but everyone is still doing what is right in their own eyes.

The kingdom Zimri certainly dreamed of does not last long. He is king for a week before civil war breaks out with Omri eventually emerging victorious. History suggests that Omri's reign was quite influential in the world, but the author emphasizes only this: Omri and his son Ahab were more wicked than anyone before them. They bring Baal worship into the land! Jericho is rebuilt on his watch! Israel is reverting back to Canaan!

RAMAH MONTHLY

We remember at the end of the era of the Judges when Samuel was being raised up, we were told that the word of God was rare in those days (1 Sam 3:1). Throughout much of the era of the judges until the Lord sent Samuel, they didn't have any guidance or direction from God. It's a sign of judgment when God doesn't speak to his people, and the nation seems to be under that judgment again. Since David's kingdom was divided under his grandson Rehoboam, we haven't seen prophets sent to the kings of the Northern Kingdom in the way that prophets brought the word of God to Saul, David, and Solomon. That is, until Elijah. Elijah brings the word of the Lord.

In the days when the worship of Baal is being actively promoted by the wicked kings of the north, God sends the prophet Elijah to confront this false worship. Elijah's name means "Yahweh is God," and he will demonstrate that truth in a variety of ways throughout his ministry in the days of wicked King Ahab. The Canaanites (and now the Israelites thanks to Ahab) believed that Baal was the god of rain and fertility. He was only one of many gods that affected their livelihood, but they believed Baal in particular brought rain. Here comes Elijah announcing that Yahweh, the only God, is the one who controls rain, and he says that God will stop the rain. Baal will be unable to do anything about it, but God provides for his servant Elijah. The Lord provides for this new prophet like Moses in the same way he provided after the escape from Egypt. God not only provides miraculous portions of bread and meat in the middle of a drought, but Yahweh uses a faithful widow to provide according to his word.

Yahweh is not only the only one who controls the rains, but he is also the giver of life. Baal was supposedly able to give life, but Elijah confronts that lie. This same widow's son lays dying, and she knows that ultimately God is in control of that. She assumes it's a sign of God's judgment on her sin, but Elijah intercedes for her simply on the fact that Yahweh is the only one who can truly give life. God hears and answers Elijah's prayer. He is victorious. Not Baal.

Elijah's confrontation with the pagan religion that Ahab has brought into the land is not over, but it's already clear what the outcome will be. Yahweh is God, and Elijah keeps pointing to that truth. He also points us to Christ, the one who multiplies food and raises the dead. In a world full of Baals, cling to Christ.

Friday, June 20

Read: 1 Kings 18

The drought in Samaria (the northern kingdom of Israel) has gone on for three years, but it's about to end thanks to the prayers of Elijah (see James 5:17). The question for the people will be who caused the drought to end. Baal or Yahweh? 1 Kings 18 makes the answer abundantly clear.

Before facing Ahab, Elijah first runs into Obadiah. He is not the minor prophet, but he is a key figure on Ahab's staff. Obadiah also happens to be faithful to Yahweh and puts his faith into action. Sadly, like many of us, Obadiah is also fearful and prone to compromise. He is afraid to proclaim the truth about Yahweh to Ahab. This whole chapter should strengthen us to not be fearful like Obadiah.

Ahab and Elijah finally meet. The king mistakenly thinks that the prophet is the one who has caused all this trouble in Israel, but Elijah knows that it is Ahab's sin that has caused the problems in the land. Achan had troubled Israel in the past (Josh 6–7). Ahab is the new Achan, the real troubler of Israel and this will be proven just as publicly as was Achan's sin. Elijah challenges Ahab and his chosen idol Baal. The site of the showdown will be Mount Carmel, a mountain range on the border between Israel and Jezebel's native land of Phoenicia. Supported by 850 prophets, Baal will have the home field advantage.

Elijah challenges his generation much like Joshua in his own day (Josh 24:15): how long will Israel waver between two opinions? These Jewish men who have made themselves priests of Baal are still keeping an eye on Yahweh. Maybe he is the true God after all. Elijah's test will make the answer plain. He gives Ahab's team every possible advantage. If only Baal would answer. The many prophets try to get his attention, but of course he is not there to hear. For hours they call out in prayer, they fervently dance, even cutting themselves in an effort to get their god's attention so that he will come down to them. Let this be a reminder to Christians that biblical worship is not about frantically calling God down to us. We don't have to get his attention or stir ourselves up emotionally in order to encounter him. Instead look to Elijah's example. He simply prays, and God hears and answers that prayer. God consumes the sacrifice and the entire altar itself. Everyone plainly sees that only Yahweh is God.

The drought may be over but the battle with Ahab is not. The battle against sin and the devil rages on. Let us pray like Elijah, for the Lord is God.

Weekend Devotion: The Basis of Assurance

Jim, a man in our church, was talking with his neighbor when their conversation turned to spiritual things. “When you die,” Jim asked pointedly, “if God were to ask you why He should let you into Heaven, what would you say?”

The neighbor hesitated. Like almost all Americans, he considered himself a future citizen of Heaven. But it was obvious that up to that point he had thought of his entrance into a blissful eternity as somehow automatic—he probably had never imagined a scenario like Jim described. Finally an answer stumbled out, beginning with the words “Because I ...”

Without describing the details, I can tell you that his answer was unbiblical. It was the kind of reply that will draw a terrible, shocking response from God at the judgment and haunt millions in eternity forever.

Nearly everyone’s answer to this question begins with “Because I,” followed by phrases such as “led a good life,” “prayed to receive Christ,” “attended church,” “was baptized,” “tried to keep the Ten Commandments,” “lived by the Golden Rule,” “had a spiritual experience,” “helped others,” etc.

How would you answer that classic question? If your response begins with “Because I . . .” your assurance may be built on a foundation of sand. Regardless of how the sentence is finished, most answers beginning with “Because I ...” are really the same answer. They all reflect confidence in the same flimsy, self-built foundation—a foundation that will crumble into hell on the day we stand before God.

We must begin by looking for assurance in the right places.

Where do we find out about God and the things of God in the first place? How do we know what we know about God, salvation, and eternal life? What tells us about Jesus Christ and His life, death, and resurrection? Where do we get information about Heaven and how to get there? We are told about these things in the *Bible*. Then where should we look for *assurance* regarding them?

In the Bible, God’s Word.

Three Places Where Assurance Rests

Our confidence that we are going to Heaven shouldn’t be based upon a hope that begins with “Because I ...” but on one that begins with “Because God. . .”

Assurance of salvation rests on the character of God.

Believers in Christ can be assured of salvation because God is perfect and good.

In 2 Timothy 1:12, the apostle Paul expressed a steadfast assurance of his salvation. Notice where he placed his confidence: “I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (NASB). He relied not on anything *he* had *done*—he relied on *whom* he had *believed*. Paul’s assurance rested on the character of God; he was convinced that God was altogether good and able to preserve his salvation for the Day of Judgment.

God is perfect. He is the perfect Judge, but He is also perfectly merciful. He has perfect wrath toward the unrepentant, but He has perfect mercy for those who are willing to turn from their sins and come to Him. Will the Lord, who is perfectly merciful, reject anyone—including you—who seeks Him? How could He coldly ignore you and still be perfectly merciful? How could He turn you away when Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37)? Since Jesus was merciful to all who came to Him and rejected no one who sincerely wanted Him, you can have assurance that His tenderly merciful Father has not rejected you if you’ve asked Him for His Spirit.

Incidentally, because of the infallible character of God, you can also be sure that your relationship with Him is not a temporary one. Paul made this point in Philippians 1:6: “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” In His perfect love and unchanging mercy, God will not receive you today and reject you tomorrow. He did not begin the “good work” of making you like Christ without the ability or willingness to “bring it to completion.”

Assurance of salvation rests on the work of Jesus Christ

Assurance of salvation rests on the truth of God’s promises

[Note: these portions have been removed for space, but the entire book is worth your time if you’re interested. Just let a pastor know, and they’d be glad to help you find a copy.]

Do you rely on the character of God, trust in the work of Jesus Christ, and believe the promises given by the Spirit of God?

These are the unshakable foundations for the assurance of your salvation. All other evidence that leads you to be sure of your salvation should be secondary to and built upon these objective, God-centered facts.

I suppose it's just human nature, though, to want to base our assurance on personal experience, as we do in most things. For instance, the weather forecaster may predict rain, but we feel more certain about it when we see the dark, overcast skies for ourselves. But this tempting tendency can be ruinous when it comes to seeking the assurance of our salvation.

For eighteen years in the early twentieth century, H. A. Ironside was pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. An elderly man confessed to him desperate struggles with the assurance of his salvation. He told Pastor Ironside how he longed for some definite witness that he could not mistake.

"Suppose," said Ironside, "that you had a vision of an angel who told you your sins were forgiven. Would that be enough to rest on?"

"Yes," the man replied, "I think it would. An angel should be right."

"But," inquired Ironside, "suppose on your deathbed Satan came and said, 'I was that angel, transformed to deceive you?' What would you say?"

The man was speechless.

The pastor told him that God has given us something more reliable and authoritative than the voice of an angel. He has given us His Son and His Word.

Then Ironside asked a question each of us needs to answer:

"Isn't that enough to rest on?"

Excerpted from How Can I Be Sure I'm a Christian? The Satisfying Certainty of Eternal Life by Don Whitney.

Don
Whitney



*This Sunday's Sermon:
The Message of 1 Timothy*

Monday, June 23

Read: 1 Kings 19; Psalm 30

Our greatest victories may sometimes feel like failures. Elijah prevailed over hundreds of prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The victory of Yahweh over Ahab's god was clear. Both Elijah and Ahab returned to Jezreel, and the news of Elijah's victory reaches the ears of Jezebel. Whatever Elijah may have expected, Jezebel's response is to threaten his life. She does not acknowledge that Yahweh is God like Ahab's prophets had. Filled with some mixture of failure and fear, Elijah runs for his life. Starting in the north in Jezreel, he runs about a hundred miles far south into the wilderness of Beersheba. Notice that the word of the Lord is not in this scene. This is reason enough to think that Elijah may not be following God in this moment.

The messenger of Jezebel brought a threat of death but the messenger of Yahweh brings life as the angel feeds and nourishes Elijah. Strengthened anew, Elijah goes to Mount Sinai (called Horeb in this passage) which is where Moses met with God for forty days and nights before the giving of the law. Like Moses hid in the cleft of the rock (a cave) when God passed by, Elijah seeks refuge in a cave as God visits him on the same mountain. God asks Elijah the same question at the beginning and end of the mountain meeting. Meeting with God should change Elijah's perspective, but he is too focused on Jezebel's opposition to remember all that God has done. When God appeared to Israel at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, he arrived in thunder and lightning and smoke in a thick cloud. At Mount Carmel God consumed Elijah's offering in a mighty fire. God certainly could reveal himself in dramatic signs when he wanted, but this time Yahweh is not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. This time God is speaking in a whisper. A whisper is easy to miss; so, too, was it easy for Elijah to miss the hand of God in all that was taking place. God reveals his will to Elijah, but we're not told that Elijah actually obeys. Elisha, on the other hand, is eager to follow God's will as he enters ministry and eventually succeeds Elijah. His quick obedience is a sharp contrast with Elijah's present attitude.

May we not grow weary in well doing. Opposition will come, but we can be confident God is always at work even when we don't perceive it. As Christians today, let us not seek any "still small voices" outside of Scripture. Elijah did hear God speak, but the focus was on God's words. We have the complete, sufficient trustworthy word of God. Will we listen?

Does the mercy of God amaze you? Does God sometimes show grace to people that you don't think deserve it? We have seen enough of Ahab to know that he is a wicked man. We will see even more of Ahab to assure us that our assessment is correct: Ahab is a wicked man. But God, for his own reasons, shows mercy to Ahab and the rebellious northern nation of Israel.

The king of Syria is busy at war, and he sets his eye on Samaria and Ahab. The pagan king Ben-hadad demands ransom in order to avoid attack. He wants Ahab's greatest treasures—and Ahab agrees! Ben-hadad doesn't trust Ahab and announces his soon coming in order to receive tribute in person. The people of Israel tell Ahab to not go along with Syria's extortion. Even with the people behind him, Ahab still is willing to compromise and give away great treasure (and family!) to avoid a conflict with Ben-hadad. The bully threatens Ahab even further, but this time the king calls his bluff.

Elijah had complained that he was the only prophet left in the land, but here comes another prophet who brings the word of Yahweh to Ahab. In a shocking promise, God promises to give Ahab victory in battle and even gives him the battle plan. Round one of the battle goes in Israel's favor, but the prophet also warns Ahab that Syria will fight another day in the spring. The Syrians have convinced themselves that Yahweh is a local god. He must only be able to fight in certain locations. But once again God graciously sends his word to reassure Ahab: you will know that I am God because I am going to win this unwinnable battle. Against all odds, Israel defeats the Syrians. It's like Jericho all over again. God is saving his people in dramatic ways. Israel is victorious. Ahab should recognize Yahweh's salvation and trust him. Instead Ahab once again acts like Achan (Josh 6–7) and is not faithful in victory. In a bewildering move, Ahab does not destroy Ben-hadad but instead makes a covenant with him. Just as Achan's sin brought trouble upon the whole nation, surely Ahab's will also. Ahab needs a Samuel to hack this Agag to pieces!

The final scene of the chapter is an acted out parable. Another prophet appears and confronts Ahab just like Nathan confronted David. Ahab unwittingly agrees with the judgment that God announces. Ahab will soon die because he failed to execute Ben-hadad. God has shown him much mercy, and yet he fails to repent. Do not harden your heart like Ahab. Draw near to God today. He is full of mercy and grace.

Wednesday, June 25

Read: 1 Kings 21; Proverbs 21

A king is lounging in his palace, and he sees something that doesn't belong to him. He desires what cannot be his, but he seeks to take it anyway. It's the story of David, but it's also the story of Ahab. The spoiled idolator was sullen and vexed at the end of the previous chapter when he recognized that he was under judgment, but now he's sullen and vexed over a vineyard. A vineyard that he desires to turn into a vegetable garden. The only other time that same phrase "vegetable garden" is used in the Old Testament is in Deuteronomy 11:10 where Egypt is described in that way. Whether he realizes it or not, Ahab is trying to make the Promised Land more like Egypt.

One man stands in his way: Naboth. Naboth isn't merely fond of his land; he knows that his land is from God. It is part of his family's inheritance in the covenant God made with Israel. To give up this land would be to give up his covenant relationship with God. No amount of money is worth that! What would you give in exchange for your soul? Jezebel thinks that she can use the power of the kingdom to secure personal gain. She uses the very words God spoke to Elijah ("Arise, and eat" in 19:5, 17) to assure her husband that their devilish desires would succeed. Just as David wrote letters to secure the death of Uriah to cover up his sin, Jezebel writes letters to secure Naboth's death and achieve her sin. Jezebel receives words from the banquet announcing Naboth's death just as David coldly receives word from the battlefield announcing Uriah's death. Ahab's stony path to the garden is wide open.

No one else in town may have seen Ahab's wickedness against Naboth, but God saw. No one else may have known the part Jezebel played, but God knew. God always sees. He always knows. And he will always bring justice in his own time. The Lord sends Elijah to announce to Ahab the impending judgment. Just as dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, so too will dogs lick up the blood of Ahab. The dogs will eat Jezebel in her death. The family of Ahab will be cut off just like the family of Jeroboam was cut off and the family of Baasha was cut off. Ahab's wicked house will come to a cruel end. But it will actually wait until Ahab's son reigns, because Ahab hears the word of the Lord and repents. God will delay the disaster. If God showed mercy to wicked Ahab, is grace not available to the vilest of sinners? Praise the Lord.

Our narrative has been located mainly in the Northern Kingdom where Ahab reigns, but Jehoshaphat, king of the Southern Kingdom, is drawn into our reading. He is pulled into the story when he marries his son to Ahab's daughter. Jehoshaphat has the blessings of a generally good king, but this decision will bring terrible consequences in the future. Ahab draws away the king of Judah over a great feast and entices him to join forces for battle. This is not the type of reunion between north and south that the nation needs.

Being a somewhat godly king, Jehoshaphat at least cares to know what God says about this prospect. Ahab gathers all of his yes-men, and they tell the king exactly what he wants to hear. Judah's king understands what is going on, and asks again for a prophet who can hear from Yahweh. Ahab knows the right man for the job, but he hates him. Micaiah will stand straight and declare, "Thus says the Lord." While the two kings wait for the true prophet, lying prophets continue to take God's name in vain by saying that Yahweh will give victory when that is not at all what God has said. The messenger bringing Micaiah even pleads with him, "Give the kings the same message. Give a good word to Ahab." The prophet assures the messenger that he will speak only what God actually says.

In a comical scene, Micaiah mockingly gives Ahab the message he wants to hear, but Ahab recognizes this is just a mockery of his favored prophets. When the prophet gives the real message from God, he essentially says, "See, I told you that he wouldn't bring good news!" Not only has God ordained that Ahab will lose the battle, but God allowed lying spirits to tell Ahab that he would win the battle. Ahab is not a man who welcomes or recognizes the truth; therefore, he has been tested by lies. We see the character of these false prophets as Zedekiah attacks the true prophet Micaiah. Ahab's treatment of the true spokesman for God is typical of what many prophets throughout the Bible receive.

The battle that is doomed to fail is due to begin. Ahab disguises himself in an effort to escape certain death and also cowardly tells Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes into battle. Perhaps the wrong king will die. The king of Judah prays for help, and God answers his prayer. As for Ahab, God sovereignly appoints an archer who shoots the king in just the right place. What might look like bad luck to someone who worships false gods is clearly the divine judgment of God. God's word always comes true.

Friday, June 27

Read: 2 Chronicles 19–20; Psalm 118

Many people long for a second chance from God. Jehoshaphat received a second chance. After a foolish alliance with the now-dead Ahab, God had spared Jehoshaphat's life in that same battle. He safely returns to his kingdom of Judah and his home in Jerusalem. God sends a word of conviction through the prophet Jehu. Now it's clear that the marriage alliance was actually an act of treason with the wicked. Nevertheless, God graciously gives Jehoshaphat a second chance.

God's grace in Jehoshaphat's life is not wasted. The king personally travels his land bringing revival among his people. Then he appoints leaders of integrity who will make sure that the nation is ruled righteously as well. The best way for the nation to avoid God's wrath is to rule according to his word.

As Jehoshaphat is ruling the nation righteously, he is given an opportunity to exercise his faith in Yahweh. The opportunity will come through the threat of war. Many kings have cowered in fear rather than standing in faith during similar circumstances. How will Jehoshaphat fare? Even though he fears, he seeks the Lord. This is a godly king in his best moments. Challenges and dangers will always arise, but will we seek God by faith? The king leads the whole nation to seek God in prayer and fasting. As he prays, this son of David points to the promises God made with Abraham. He is praying just like godly kings are supposed to pray. His trust is in the Lord.

Like many times before, God's words come through his prophet and comforts his people. God will fight the battle for his people. They must face the enemy, not in fear but in faith. Before the battle begins, God's king leads the people to trust in the Lord. They praise the Lord with the constant refrain of Psalm 118: "Give thanks to Yahweh, for His lovingkindness endures forever." As the people trusted and worshiped Yahweh, the enemies turned on one another and destroyed themselves. God delivered again! He gives great spoils to the nation, and they give great praise to God.

The Chronicler's verdict upon Jehoshaphat's reign: he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. He stumbled. He made foolish alliances, both with Ahab and again with his son Ahaziah. God sovereignly ruled through every circumstance for his purposes. Jehoshaphat's alliances failed. His love for the Lord was real, even if it was not real in many of the people of his nation. This king was as imperfect as we, yet let us trust and serve and praise the same God, for his lovingkindness endures forever.

Weekend Devotion: Pain of a Particular Kind

*An excerpt from **Pain of a Particular Kind: The Loss of a Child** by Peter Barnes. Barnes draws from the Scriptures and his experience in the loss of a grandchild in this book.*

It is a sad truth that we usually delve far more deeply into the truths of the Christian faith in times of turmoil and suffering than in times of bliss and prosperity. It is chastening and affliction that teach us the need for obedience and which yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Psa. 119:67, 71, 75; Heb 12:4-11). The Welsh hymn-writer and evangelist, William Williams, declared that he acquired more knowledge of himself and the goodness of God while on his deathbed than he had during the previous forty years of his life. In the words of the Puritan Richard Baxter: ‘suffering so unbolts the door of the heart, that the word hath easier entrance.’ We suddenly find we have ears to hear, and God’s word speaks to us, perhaps more directly and with greater unction than it ever had before.

God uses suffering to make the believer more compassionate and better able to minister to others. A friend of Amy Carmichael once said: ‘A woman who has no experiences in the dark has no secrets to share in the light.’ To the wayward congregation at Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

This biblical truth is movingly illustrated in the life of Robert Lewis Dabney. In 1855 the Southern Presbyterian theologian lost two sons, and in 1862 was to endure the death of a third. About the year 1859 he visited the home of a couple whose only child, a little boy, lay ill with fever. A pastor’s wife, who was present, recalled of Dabney:

“Soon he walked to the bed, and kneeling near the mother, gave way to a flood of tears such as I then thought I had never seen a man weep. Then he offered such a prayer as you can well imagine that great tender heart, so recently bereaved, would offer for the afflicted parents, and the precious child then almost in the Saviour’s arms.”

If love is, in the poet James McAuley's words, "how to mean the other's being," there can be no doubt that Dabney's own suffering enabled him later to minister to others with such deep compassion. One grieving mother remembered those who visited her in her sadness, but added: "One that particularly stands out in my mind was from a man who didn't say much, but simply sat with me and cried."

We are wired to look for quick solutions. If the water pipe has burst, I am keen to find a plumber to fix it; if my back aches, I want the doctor to alleviate the pain as soon as possible. Grief, however, is different. I want a solution or some comfort, yes, but an instant one only makes matters worse. For suffering parents or grandparents or siblings, the first need is not someone who wants to cheer us up. That can come further down the track. The immediate need - and perhaps the need for quite a while - is the reassurance that deep lament is met with deep empathy.

As our little Emily was passing from this life, the journey was not one which immediately expanded my sympathy for others. There were hints of that, but overall my world felt like it was shrinking, to one precious little five year old girl who was fading before our eyes. It seemed like I thought of her all day, every day, and not much else mattered. John Chrysostom pointed out that we center on our sorrows:

"As they who suffer pain in any part of their bodies, think that their sufferings exceed their neighbour's. He that has a disease of the eye thinks there is nothing so painful, and he that has a disorder of the stomach, considers that the sorest of diseases, and each thinks that the heaviest of suffering, with which he is himself afflicted. So it is with sorrow, each thinks his own present grief the most severe."

Or, to quote the poet Emily Dickinson:

I measure every Grief I meet
With narrow, probing, Eyes -
I wonder if It weighs like Mine -
Or has an Easier size."

That, sad to say, was my immediate experience.

“Old age came suddenly by suffering speed,” wrote Boethius. Outwardly, as a Christian pastor, I tried to empathise with the sufferings of others, all the while thinking that theirs could not possibly be compared to mine, or to that of my granddaughter and her family. Sharing the joy of the safe arrival of other children became tinged with an ungodly envy, and inability to enter fully into the happiness of others. The apostle Paul looked outward, but I was being pressed inward. It has been an ongoing battle to recapture a greater sense of empathy for others.

For all this, the main blessing that comes to the Christian through his suffering is that it drives him to focus his attention more closely upon the city which is to come. The Christian realises that his suffering is but for a short time (John 16:21; 2 Cor. 4:17), and cannot be compared to the glory which is to come (Rom. 8:18). One of our major problems in this life is that we tend to focus only on this world, and so we need to be weaned from the wrong sort of attachment to it. From 1858 to 1862 Rev. John William Matheson and his wife Mary laboured to bring the gospel of salvation to Tanna in the New Hebrides, or what is now called Vanuatu. They battled on, enduring very poor health and the loss of their infant daughter. Yet they retained their Christian perspective, and Mary Matheson affirmed: “One moment in heaven will amply compensate for all we have suffered here.” All Christians must seek to cultivate the same outlook.



Peter
Barnes

*This Sunday's Sermon:
The Message of 2 Timothy*

Hymn of the Month

“His Mercy is More”

There are times when the weight of our failures presses on us—harsh words poken, opportunities missed, relationships strained. For many, that weight feels sharpest in the context of family. Regret over the past or grief over brokenness can be hard to shake.

But for those in Christ, this hymn offers comfort: “Our sins they are many; his mercy is more.”

God knows every sin we’ve committed (Heb 4:13). Yet by his grace, he “counts not their sum” (Ps 130:3–4). As Micah writes, he has hurled our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19), and Paul reminds us that the record of debt against us has been nailed to the cross (Col 2:14). His mercy reaches where our memory and shame cannot.

God knows our wandering, yet he is the Father who runs to welcome us home (Luke 15:20). He doesn’t simply tolerate our return—he delights to show mercy. He receives the weak, the broken, and the undeserving (Isa 55:7), not because of who we are, but because of who Christ is.

“His blood was the payment; his life was the cost” captures what Scripture proclaims. As Paul writes, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Mercy came at a cost, but it comes to us freely. It is stronger than the darkness, new every morning (Lam 3:22–23). Take heart. If you are in Christ, your sin is real—but “his mercy is more.”

-Pastor Laramie

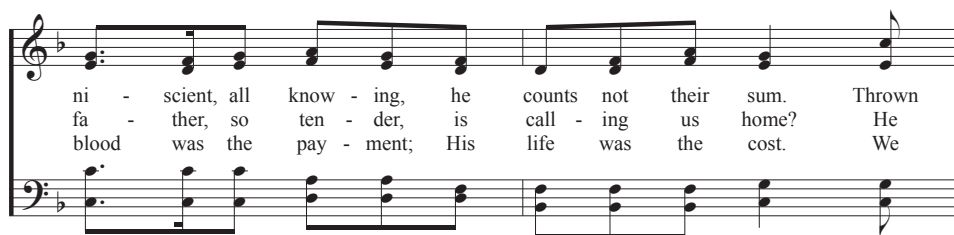


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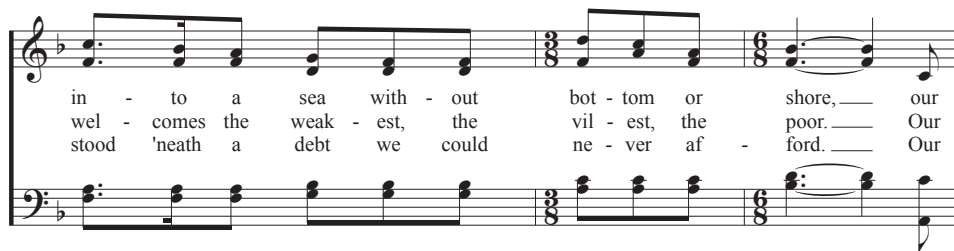
His Mercy Is More



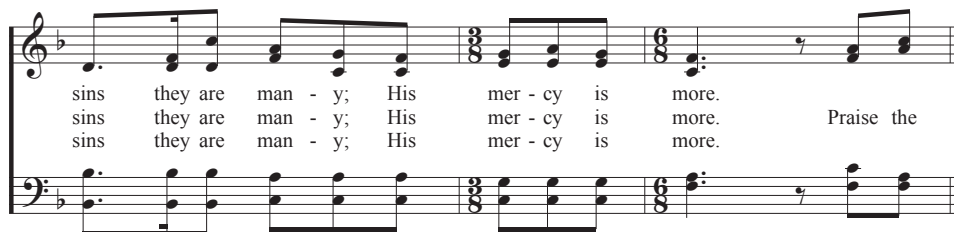
1. What love could re - mem - ber no wrongs we have done? Om -
 2. What pa - tience would wait as we con - stant - ly roam? What
 3. What rich - es of kind - ness He lav - ished on us! His



ni - scient, all know - ing, he counts not their sum. Thrown
 fa - ther, so ten - der, is call - ing us home? He
 blood was the pay - ment; His life was the cost. We



in - to a sea with - out bot - tom or shore, — our
 wel - comes the weak - est, the vil - est, the poor. — Our
 stood 'neath a debt we could ne - ver af - ford. — Our



sins they are man - y; His mer - cy is more.
 sins they are man - y; His mer - cy is more. Praise the
 sins they are man - y; His mer - cy is more.

Words and Music by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa

Lord, His mer - cy is more,

strong - er than dark - ness, new ev - 'ry morn. Our

sins they are man - y; His mer - cy is more.

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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