

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Wisdom Needed to Finish Well – Part I.*"

We have been in a series called, "*Pursuing Wisdom.*"

Let me begin w/ a quick question. Have any of you heard of Charles Templeton?

I hadn't, but this past week I read about him. He ministered w/ Billy Graham. Together they were called, "The Gold Dust Twins." The two of them, along w/ Torrey Johnson, founded Youth for Christ.

John MacArthur said, "*By all accounts, Charles Templeton was the more gifted preacher...intelligent, handsome, winsome, eloquent, oratorical, brilliant, persuasive, effective. All those words were used to describe him. Charles Templeton overshadowed Billy Graham.*"

They went on an evangelistic tour of Europe, preaching to large audiences in England, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, and other places.

In 1946 the NAE, the National Association of Evangelicals, gave him the award: "Best Used of God." What a weird award and how did they determine who won?

In the 1950s Charles Templeton was given an opportunity to have weekly television programs on NBC and CBS. He preached in the United States to as many as 20,000 people per night across the country, and in youth rallies with thousands of young people. He became a church planter and pastor. He attended Princeton Seminary and had a week of gospel preaching at Yale University.

Then in 1957 Charles declared himself an agnostic. He rejected the Bible and Christ. He attributed his rejection to the reading of Thomas Paine. Over ten days he also read Voltaire, Bertrand Russell, Robert Ingersoll, David Hume, and Aldous Huxley. By the end of those ten days he was virtually an atheist.

He left the ministry with \$600 in his pocket, returned to Canada, and became a journalist. Then he became a politician, and almost became the Prime Minister of Canada. Only five years before his death, he wrote, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith.*

The part that surprised me the most about Charles isn't that he turned from the Lord, since many people turn from the Lord. The part that surprised me is he did it when he was older after serving the Lord for so many years.

When people commit apostasy, don't we expect it to happen when they're young? We hear all the statistics about people leaving the church, and the statistics almost always refer to young people.

I understand the concern for young people to turn from the Lord, but in scripture when people turned away it was typically when they were older.

This is surprising to me b/c it seems like the opposite of what we'd expect. We'd expect older people to finish well...but that's not the case.

Go ahead and turn to **1 Kings 11**, a familiar chapter. I just want to show you one verse, which gave me the idea for this sermon.

Look at **verse 4**...

1 Kings 11:4 For WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

We spent the last few weeks looking at Solomon and notice his heart was turned away from the Lord when he **was old**.

If Solomon was the only example of a king turning from the Lord when he's old I wouldn't have made this a sermon, but since it's a theme I thought it deserved attention. If Scripture makes something important through repetition, we should make it important.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson 1: These kings reveal it's hard to finish well (example 1) Solomon

Isn't it's surprising that it says when he was old? Don't we typically think the older the wiser?

Job thought this...

Job 12:12 Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.

We expect the old to be wise, and when we think about the foolish, we expect them to be young.

Since the aged are supposed to be wise, and Solomon turned from the Lord when he was older, this is one more instance of his foolishness.

The next part of lesson one...

Lesson 1: These kings reveal it's hard to finish well (example 2) Saul.

Since I'm trying to look at many examples I can't give each example much attention. But hopefully as we move quickly from one example to the next it will sink in just how frequently this occurred so we can be on guard against it.

Saul finished so poorly you can easily forget how well he started:

- Early on he was humble, and so afraid of the spotlight that he couldn't be found when it was time for his anointing. He was hiding among the baggage.

- God gave him a new heart and a great supporting cast.
- He defeated the Ammonites and defended the men of Jabesh Gilead.

But over time he neglected his responsibilities because he became jealous of David and consumed w/ killing him.

By the end of Saul's life there's nothing good we can say about him. He failed as a commander, father, friend, and king.

Israel's defeat was his fault. His leadership was terrible. Instead of preparing Israel for war, the night before the battle he was consulting a medium.

FB Meyer said, *"It is a very solemn thought! No career could begin with fairer, brighter prospects than Saul had, and none could close in more absolute midnight of despair; and yet such a fate may befall us, unless we watch, and pray, and walk humbly with our God."*

The next part of lesson one...

Lesson 1: These kings reveal it's hard to finish well (part 3) Hezekiah.

Go ahead and turn to **2 Kings 20**.

Hezekiah was one of the two greatest reformers. He purified the temple, reestablished Passover, and had a great victory over the Assyrians b/c he trusted God. But later in life he became proud.

The context is Hezekiah was sick, God told him he would die, he insisted on living, and God allowed it. He recovered and look at **verse 20...**

2 Kings 20:12 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

This visit was completely political and had nothing to do with Hezekiah's sickness. Babylon was under the yoke of Assyria, so Babylon wanted Judah to ally with them against Assyria.

2 Kings 20:13 And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.

Babylon was a superpower at the time, but Judah wasn't. Hezekiah wanted to impress them so he showed off his wealth. He wasn't trying to make God look good, he was trying to make himself look good...to ungodly people who were part of an ungodly nation.

Look what happened next...

2 Kings 20:14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” And Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” **15** He said, “What have they seen in your house?” And Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

Isaiah knew, he was just giving Hezekiah a chance to admit it.

2 Kings 20:16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord: **17** Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. **18** And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

All of this was more than 100 years away, but it happened just as Isaiah said it would when Babylon took the Jews into exile.

2 Kings 20:19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

This was a very selfish response. Isaiah said all this bad stuff would happen and Hezekiah said, “Glad it won’t be in my lifetime!”

The extra 15 years God gave him didn’t make him a better man.

This terrible blunder – the greatest of his life – could have been avoided if Hezekiah would’ve died when God told him to...and he wouldn’t have ended up giving birth to Manasseh, the worst king in the OT!

He started off wonderfully, but didn’t finish well.

Our next example...

Lesson 1: These kings reveal it’s hard to finish well (part 4) Asa.

Turn to the next book, **2 Chronicles 14**.

Look at verse eight...

2 Chronicles 14:8 And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valor.

Asa had 580,000 men. This sounds pretty formidable until we see what he faced...

2 Chronicles 14:9 Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah.

This is almost twice the size of Asa's army!

Look what he does...

2 Chronicles 14:10 And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11 And Asa cried to the Lord his God, "O Lord, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O Lord, you are our God; let not man prevail against you."

This is a great prayer:

- Asa cries out to the LORD.
- He completely depends on God.
- He expresses his helplessness apart from God's intervention.
- He recognized that in attacking God's people, they were attacking God.

How many of us have ever prayed like this? Really poured our hearts out to the LORD, saying something like, "*LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless like me. I'm relying on you completely. In your name I'm facing this terrible trial. You are my only hope.*"

Watch what happens...

2 Chronicles 14:12 So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. 13 Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until none remained alive, for they were broken before the Lord and his army. The men of Judah carried away very much spoil. 14 And they attacked all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord was upon them. They plundered all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. 15 And they struck down the tents of those who had livestock and carried away sheep in abundance and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

God honored Asa's dependence on him by giving him a great victory and much spoil.

Now go two chapters ahead to **2 Chr 16**.

Does your Bible have a heading for this chapter? In the NIV and ESV it says, "Asa's Last Years."

2 Chronicles 16:1 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

So Asa gets attacked by the King of the northern kingdom of Israel. Considering the great victory God gave him over the Ethiopians earlier in his reign when he depended on him, how would you expect Asa to respond now?

But sadly, watch what happened...

2 Chronicles 16:2 Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord and the king's house and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, 3 "There is a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me."

You might remember a few weeks ago I told you God didn't want kings multiplying wealth b/c they could trust in it instead of trusting in God, and they could trust in it b/c they could use it to pay off other nations.

That's what Asa did instead of trusting God, but his actions are even worse b/c he took the wealth from the temple treasury instead of his own. He paid the king of Syria to break his covenant with the King of Israel and attack Israel. You can probably guess that Asa should not have done this.

Interestingly, watch what happened...

2 Chronicles 16:4 And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali. 5 And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and let his work cease. 6 Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.

Look like everything worked perfectly for Asa didn't it?

This is one of those places in Scripture that shows the test of obedience is not whether things go well for us.

2 Chronicles 16:7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. 8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars."

The question is: how is Asa going to respond to this rebuke?

2 Chronicles 16:10 Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time.

Instead of humbling himself, Asa rejected correction, refused to repent, and became angry at the seer. Sadly, his anger even spilled over to mistreating his own nation. He's like people who get upset and lash out at everyone around them.

Many of the kings who didn't finish well became unteachable. They were rebuked and responded poorly. Asa is the first of many examples we'll see...in fact it's the case with every single other king we'll examine!

Just keep this in mind for part 2.

2 Chronicles 16:11 The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

This is referring to the books of 1 and 2 Kings. You can also read about Asa in **1 Kings 15**.

God graciously gives Asa one more opportunity to turn back to him. But look what happened...

2 Chronicles 16:12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians. 13 And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign.

He probably had a severe case of gout or gangrene. Very mercifully God sent this illness to Asa to provide one last opportunity to seek the LORD, but his heart was hard and bitter.

Those few words, "**he did not seek the LORD**" could summarize the entire chapter:

- He didn't seek the LORD when he was attacked by Israel.
- He didn't humble himself and seek the LORD when Hanani confronted him.
- Now he doesn't seek the LORD after contracting this disease.

A sad end for a man who'd been so godly throughout his reign.

I know this is been a challenging sermon, and I want to finish with some encouragement.

We will look at more examples in part two, but for now let me say this...

Israel and Judah had 20 kings each; all of Israel's kings were bad. Of Judah's 20 kings, only a few of them were good. Of those who were good, only a few finished well.

Of the kings who finished well, none of them were perfect.

These kings serve as types of Christ. As I've told you before, every type falls short. If a type didn't fall short, it wouldn't be the type. It would be the reality.

This brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 2: Jesus is the King of Kings who finished well for us.

A thought that blessed me this week was how well Jesus fulfilled the standard for kings.

Let's consider the contrast w/ Solomon, b/c I told you that he's one of the most dramatic types of Christ in the Old Testament...

A few weeks ago we looked at **Deut 17**, which forbid kings from multiplying wives, wealth, and horses.

We know Solomon violated these commands.

Kings were not supposed to multiply these things so they wouldn't trust in earthly resources.

Jesus had no earthly resources to speak of...

Matthew 8:20 Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Imagine a king w/ no bed?

Kings were supposed to trust God, and Jesus did this perfectly too...

1 Peter 2:23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He's the best example of trusting the Father.

Now here's the encouragement I have for you...

Yes, we need to be concerned about finishing well, because it's a theme in Scripture, but the other side of this is we can't finish well...at least not perfectly. We're all sinners. We all fail.

But thank God we don't have to finish perfectly, because if we're in Christ he finished perfectly for us.

Hebrews 12:1 Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Basically, finish well!

But then listen to what it says...

Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV) looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith.

Where man fails Christ prevails.

We can finish well, b/c Christ finished well for us.

Let's pray.