

The Book of Kings (Continued; 2 Kings 9-)

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Sermon 50, Here Comes Trouble, 2 Kings 9

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Expositional Outline

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Proposition: The word of God drives history and wrenches the arc of the moral universe toward justice.

Introduction

Brothers and sisters, we come tonight to the passage that we have all been waiting for. Finally someone is doing something serious about the relentless corruption and apostasy so rife within the borders of Israel and Judah! Finally we're seeing a political solution to a political problem. At least, sort of a political problem. Obviously the ultimate problem lies in the corrupt hearts of the people of God. But the most obvious presenting problem is the godless, Ahab-tainted leadership of both Israel and Judah. It's no accident that the last two kings of Israel have been Jehoram and Ahaziah, and the last two kings of Judah have been Ahaziah and Jehoram, in that order. It's as if the narrator is trying to highlight how interchangeable the two kingdoms have become, how much they look like one another in their orgasmic pursuit of Baal. Yet tonight, the word of God decisively intervenes not by the moral suasion of a prophet or a domestically-scaled

act of mercy such as we have been seeing for the last several weeks, but rather by the brutal reality of bronze-tipped arrows in the hearts of wicked kings. What we'll see tonight is that the word of God drives history and wrenches the arc of the moral universe toward justice.

I. God's Word Catalyzes History, vv. 1-27

The first half of our chapter tonight demonstrates that the word of God makes history happen. Some low-level fighting has been going on around the border flashpoint of Ramoth-Gilead, and Jehoram has been laid up by some kind of wound. But in general, nothing too exciting is taking place. History has stalled out, you might say, until the prophetic word through Elisha barges into the situation and radically alters it.

A. It Sets Up King Jehu, vv. 1-13

First of all, the prophetic word chooses who will rule in Israel. It sets up Jehu as king. The story makes it clear that Jehu is one of Israel's top army commanders and thus an obvious choice to lead a coup. This Jehu is not the son of the Judean king Jehoshaphat, because his grandfather is not Asa but Nimshi. He's sitting around with some of his fellow officers when this prophet shows up, hauls him into an inner room, and then comes out after a minute and legs it without so much as a banal "Have a nice day!" (as D.R. Davis put it).

Why did God's word set up Jehu like this to be king? Well, the text tells us at length. It was to avenge the blood of the prophets and the blood of all God's people who had suffered under the depredations of Ahab and Jezebel. God highlights the fact that He is giving royal power to Jehu so that Jehu can take vengeance. Vengeance belongs to God, but in this case He is delegating it to a human agent.

Wow! We love stories of revenge, stories like *The Count of Monte Cristo*, in which someone deeply sinned against lets his tormentors have it in the worst way. Throughout this section of Scripture, we have been identifying with the prophetic minority, with the faithful remnant, with those Israelites who remained faithful to God even under the tyrannical, anti-God rule of Ahab ben Omri. We have felt their pain, and we have hated the wickedness that drove the house of Omri. And now, the text tells us, we will get to see the vengeance of God Himself played out at the hands of Jehu ben Nimshi, renegade army officer and warrior extraordinaire.

The question might arise, Was God telling Jehu to do this or was He simply saying that He knew Jehu would do this? It appears that God truly was commissioning Jehu to do it, based on God's statement in the next chapter (10:30) that Jehu had done "all that was in [His] heart" for Jehu to do. Again, wow.

Brothers and sisters, God is a God of vengeance. That is one of His titles in the Bible. He will repay; what a man sows, that will he reap. Beware, then, of sinning against this God. Beware of apostasy. Beware of doing what you know displeases Him. On the flip side, rejoice that God will take vengeance against those who harm His people, who try to stop His worship, who attempt to shut down the witness of His prophets. If someone has mistreated you, has sinned against you, you can let it go because you know that God is your avenger. Imagine being able to

say, “It’s in the hands of the cops and the criminal justice system and I don’t have to worry about it.” That’s a pale shadow of the full reality of God’s vengeance taken on His people’s behalf.

Well, the officers immediately notice that Jehu has this big streak of oil in his hair, and they immediately want to know what the super-secret message was all about. Jehu tries to put them off by saying “You know the man and his talk,” but they’re a little smarter than to fall for that.

By the way, notice that apparently this son of the prophets was well known to Jehu and the senior brass. The word of God can sometimes come through a complete stranger, but it will often be delivered to you by someone you know well and even by someone you don’t think much of. Some crazy person might tell you the genuine word of God. The messenger in that case is irrelevant; you will be judged on your response to the message.

Jehu responded to the message by boldly declaring that he had been anointed king. His fellow officers instantly threw their support behind him. Before news could leave Ramoth-Gilead and filter back to Samaria, Jehu jumped in his chariot and took off for Jezreel, the winter palace and vacation home of the Omride kings. There, of course, King Jehoram was recuperating from his wound.

B. It Choreographs Action Sequences, vv. 14-27

Notice how the fateful decision had been made. The Rubicon had been crossed. Jehu had come to a point where he had openly declared himself to be gunning for the position of King of Israel, and there was no turning back. From this point on, he would either have to triumph or die. All this was catalyzed by the word of God coming to him and sending him off to be king.

What follows is one of the most beautifully choreographed action sequences in the entire Bible. As far as I can tell, it has never been put on film — a crying oversight, as the inherent dramatic power of this chapter would translate very well into that medium. We get to see Jehu mount his chariot and drive off with a horde following him. We get to see the scene cut to a watchman’s view from the wall of Jezreel, and see the dust cloud and the approaching chariot charge. We feel Jehoram’s intense curiosity and fear: Has Aram won a major victory? Have the troops had to abandon Ramoth-Gilead? Is all well, or why this intense haste? We see first one messenger and then another ride out to try to hear the news and then come back faster than Jehu’s heavy war chariot can travel. And then we see Jehoram and Ahaziah decide to mount their own chariots and go out personally to ask their subordinate what in the world is going on. We see Jehu challenge Jehoram about his mother’s whoredoms and sorceries, and Jehoram turns to flee. Then Jehu loads his bow and sends an arrow punching through Jehoram’s heart from behind. This is one sick scene, but it powerfully captures the way in which God’s word makes history. Jehu, driven by the word and commission of God, furiously carries out the revenge which God had decreed. The fact that he does it in style is only the icing on the cake. Because unlike the action sequences of Hollywood, which exist simply to entertain, this action sequence actually means something. Rather than Martin Luther King Jr.’s insistence that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, I want us to see that the arc of the moral universe is wrenched

toward justice by the powerful intervention of the word of God. God's word doesn't just suggest that some justice would be good; it makes justice happen.

II. God's Word Punishes Evildoers, vv. 21-37

A. It Avenges the Blood of God's Servants, vv. 21-26

God's word avenges the blood of God's servants. Yes, God said that children should not be put to death for the iniquity of their fathers. And Jehoram isn't entirely being punished just for Ahab's guilt. He has plenty of guilt of his own. Yet the crime that is highlighted here in the text is the crime of killing Naboth and taking possession of his vineyard — a crime, incidentally, in which Jehu confesses his own complicity even while he shoots down Jehoram for his alleged complicity. What's the deal with that? Well, the point is that Ahab alone wasn't guilty. The entire family and household of Omri was implicated. Ahaziah may not have been the ringleader in the deed like his grandmother Jezebel, but he was complicit in it all the same. The Bible perfectly balances the individual and corporate in its accounts — and though it acknowledges individual responsibility, it knows too that there is such a thing as family guilt. Jehoram had to die because he had led Israel into sin and because he had walked in the ways of his father and his mother. They had killed Naboth and his sons, and explicitly or implicitly, Jehoram had consented to that deed and to the lifestyle that gave birth to it. So even though Jehu had been a servant of Ahab and had been present when Ahab brought the army to help him take over Naboth's vineyard, in the ways of Providence he ends up avenging the very Naboth his former royal master had murdered.

Did you notice that this whole scene takes place on the very plot of ground that had formerly been Naboth's? It doesn't take a literary critic to see the connection. God is avenging the blood of his righteous servant. He does it at His own speed, and He uses those who are far from perfect themselves to carry out His revenge. Yet He nonetheless avenges His servants.

That should hearten you. It should allow you to let go of the offenses you've suffered, because no matter how bad they are, God will reckon with them. He will not leave you unavenged.

Also, this should open our eyes to the providence of God at work around us. The fact that someone is personally evil or at least opportunistic and unprincipled doesn't mean that he isn't God's agent for some particular task. God requisitions the morally deficient all the time. After all, He uses us, doesn't He?

The Christian radio station my family listened to when I was young regularly played a song that had the line, "God can only use a soldier He can trust." Every time I heard it, that song made me think of Gideon and Peter and all the other soldiers God used who betrayed Him and denied Him. "Mom," I would say, "If God can only use a soldier He can trust, then He basically can't use any soldiers, ever, can He?" Brothers and sisters, we should strive to be people whom God can trust. That's obvious. But the fact of the matter is that He certainly does make use of soldiers He can't trust, soldiers we would be fools to trust, and yet soldiers who are accomplishing His plans for His world.

So see that God's word avenges the blood of His servants. The blood of righteous Naboth cried from the ground, and God heard it. He will hear your cries too.

B. It Destroys the Corrupters of God's People, vv. 27-29

But God's word doesn't just avenge His servants' blood. It also destroys those who corrupt God's people by leading them into false worship, as Ahaziah ben Jehoram king of Judah did. He was Ahab's grandson and Jehoram of Israel's nephew. He was part of the Omride line. And his punishment was no less gruesome than Jehoram's, though it seems to have been delayed a bit longer. Indeed, it appears from Chronicles that he was able to escape all the way to Samaria, only to come out of hiding there and try fleeing again. This time he was wounded at the ascent of Gur and died in Megiddo. Yet instead of being thrown on the plot of Naboth, unburied and unmourned, he at least was reverently placed in the tombs of his fathers in the city of David. The line of David is stronger than the line of Omri. Though he was part Ahab, he was also part David, and God's mercy came to him because of it.

Don't corrupt God's people. Don't lead them into false worship. Church leaders, this is for you. Fathers, this is for you. Mothers, this is for you. You have responsibility for the nurture of God's people, and if you misuse it (as Ahaziah did), you will not escape God's righteous judgment. If you are an ally of the wicked, someone who might object to their deaths, then you won't escape God's wrath.

C. It Makes Dog Food out of those who Defy It, vv. 30-37

Well, finally, we see that the word of God made dog food out of Jezebel. She did her hair and makeup like a queen and boldly faced down Jehu, who just as boldly had her defenestrated and then calmly trampled her in the street with his chariot. That's taking a coup to new levels, right? Instead of shooting her through the heart, he expressed his contempt for her wickedness by running over her with his heavy war chariot that might have been pulled by four horses. It's a well-known urban legend that someone was killed during the filming of the *Ben-Hur* chariot race, but apparently that never happened. This gruesome scene really did happen, though — and we can imagine that Jezebel's fate was not fun. She became dog food in the very vineyard whose owner she had murdered.

Brothers and sisters, this is the fate of those who defy the word of the Lord. If God says something and you think you know better and that you can defy the word of God, look out. If God can turn Jezebel into dog food, then He can do the same to you.

Where might we defy the word of God? Well, rebelling against people who told her the word of the Lord was Jezebel's sin. She refused to listen to Elijah and Elisha. And by the same token, as self-serving as it may sound, I warn you that if you refuse to listen to your pastor when he tells you God's word, you are heading for this same fate. If you insist, like Jezebel, on worshipping false gods, you are headed for this same fate. If the gods of pleasure, wealth, and power grip and move you to worship, then you will suffer what Jezebel suffered — maybe not on earth, but in the world to come. If you murder and steal, look out. If you hate in your heart and covet, look out. The wrath of God is coming.

God catalyzes history and punishes evildoers. And that is pretty much the message of this chapter. God saves — that's what Elisha's name proclaims. But sometimes, He saves by destroying the wicked. Don't be wicked. Take refuge in Jesus Christ, who came to save you from your sins so that God's wrath will not come upon you at the end of history. Amen.