

The Ultimate Priority

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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Kings 7:51. After finishing Ruth last week, I have been working for some time on where to go next and we're not going to exposit 1 & 2 Kings, especially starting at 7:51 probably wouldn't be the way to do it. But I really felt like we needed to take five or six weeks and do sort of a topical series but it's kind of an exegetical/topical series in that the book of Kings, 1 & 2 Kings really one book in the Hebrew Bible is, I think, very relevant to us right now and the church in America in general, the evangelical, Bible-believing church, but also to us as Christians and the reason I've chosen this book is that it was written at a time when the people of God were in exile. 1 & 2 Kings is aimed at the people of Israel when they are in the Babylonian exile. Remember how God's people all were under one king, Saul, then David? Remember, and then Solomon, the united monarchy, God's people one nation? After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided. It was the judgment of God upon Solomon's sin into the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom was called Israel, the southern kingdom called Judah. These two kingdoms comprising the 12 tribes of God's people, the nation together of Israel, though only one of them had the name, Israel, the southern kingdom, Judah, because of the dominant tribe in the south which is the tribe of Judah.

Well, the northern kingdom descended into wickedness very rapidly, very quickly, and within just a little over 200 years, it was destroyed by the Assyrians. And the southern kingdom of Judah continued for another 140 years after the destruction of the northern kingdom until finally in 586 the temple was destroyed; the exile was complete. The people of God were taken from the land of Judah and Judah is where Jerusalem is, where the temple was, and they are taken out of Jerusalem, out of Judah and planted in Babylon as God's judgment. It essentially said way back in Deuteronomy that, "When you don't follow me, when you begin to practice the wickedness of the nations around you, the land will vomit you out." And this is what has happened, so they are now in exile. In the book of 1 & 2 Kings was given to them when they were in exile.

It's a very helpful thing, I want to just take a minute, it's an extra-long introduction today before we get to the title of the message and all of that, but it's helpful. So, bear with me. One of the interesting things about Scripture is that we see in many places that God tells the same story multiple times. You have that in the four Gospels; you have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all telling the story of Jesus Christ, right? They are basically all

about the cross and the resurrection but we have four Gospels. Why is that? Well, God is giving that same message slightly different angles on it to four different audiences through four different authors. I love what Ken Temple said about that Gospel he shared as he was witnessing to some folks in Turkey, in Istanbul. He was talking to a gentleman who was saying, asking, "Why are there four Gospels?" as if that would somehow discredit the Gospel. And he said, "Well, God's giving us four different messages and perspectives on the glory of what Jesus Christ has done so that we can see the riches of it." And he said, "Imagine there was a car wreck here in a moment, there was a car wreck and the police come out to investigate to see what happened, would they just want one vantage point, one witness? Or would they rather have several witnesses testify to the same thing?" That's what God has done in the Gospels.

Now, an interesting thing in the Old Testament is that he has done something similar in the books of Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, that 1 & 2 Samuel, the story is retold in 1 Chronicles. 1 & 2 Kings, the story is retold in 2 Chronicles. Why? Well, the main reason is because those messages, though they are basically the same message as you read them, I mean, the Spirit inspires different things to be recorded. Like you are telling a history, one guy tells a history, he leaves out a certain thing. You're reading about the Revolutionary War, one guy majors on the Battle of Brandywine Creek and another guy doesn't. Well, it doesn't mean that one is wrong and the other is not right, it just means that they are giving a different emphasis or whatever and that's happening there. But the main reason is that Kings was given to the people of God while they were in exile. Chronicles was given to the people of God after they were back from the exile struggling in the land to rebuild the people of Israel. So, different settings and different emphases in messages.

So, 1 & 2 Kings was given to them and we believe this because the last lines of 2 Kings record the release of King Jehoiachin, the last king, one of the last kings that was arrested, not arrested, he was captured by Nebuchadnezzar. He is released in his 37th year of exile. This is the last thing that is told us in 2 Kings and that's 561 BC. We're not told about the final release of the people from Babylon. They are still in exile but this is what's happening. The last thing that happens is Jehoiachin is released. Chronicles goes on beyond that to tell about the release of the people and the return of the people, or at least the Cyrus edict which releases them.

Now, what's this matter? How does this matter? Well, it shows us that the particular emphases of Kings were aimed at people who were living in a foreign land far removed from the presence of God, far removed from the blessing of God, living under the oppression of their enemies and so it gives us a guide of how we should live. And the reason I thought about this book particularly was in thinking about the church in American culture today. You could say that in a very real way we are a people in exile, becoming more so as the culture continues to deteriorate. People used to like to think America was a Christian nation which was never actually accurate in the first place. America has never been God's country. God has blessed it. I sing "America the Beautiful" and he has blessed us from sea to shining sea, I believe that and God bless America, yes, I want that, but the only nation that's been the people of God geographically and

politically was the land of Israel, the people of Israel, and the people of God today are not defined by geographical boundaries but spiritual ones. The true church of Jesus Christ is his people today, okay? And that's the way it's always been through the history of America. The true believers were his people. America has experienced tremendous blessings and been a wonderful example of his common grace.

Now that said, the church in America can feel more exiled than ever because America had been blessed by a Judeo-Christian ethic and so much of the saltiness of this country, so many believers, that there was a preserving effect upon our country and now we're seeing more of the rancidness that comes as the people at large reject those values, right? And so we see it happening and now with a new year, a new president, maybe some new hopes in some folks' minds about maybe the economy will be a little better with some new policies and stuff like that, but the underlying issue has not changed. We are still the people of God in exile as we've always been and odds are it will continue to deteriorate spiritually unless God sends revival. Political changes, you know, though they are helpful, they are just like bandaging the surface when the heart of the country is diseased.

Now, our goal is not to change the country, our goal is to change individual lives by changing their hearts through the Gospel. But this book was given to a people living in exile to teach them what do you do when you feel like you're far from the blessings of God's presence, or you sense that you live in a place that oppresses you. That's what they were living under. Their values were not honored in society, in Babylonian society. They were mocked, made fun of, not esteemed. Their God was mocked.

So how do you live? And that's what we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks because there is a great blueprint that sort of comes out of three main themes in 1 & 2 Kings. Three main themes, and today we're going to talk about the ultimate priority. That's the title of the message, "The Ultimate Priority," and we see this in 1 & 2 Kings. How do you live in exile? Well, you need to have God's ultimate priority as your ultimate priority.

The ultimate priority, and thinking back on that, let me explain a little more about how I think this relates to us. It's not just that the cultural sense of exile that we live in, which the Bible speaks to very clearly. Peter says in his opening verse in 1 Peter 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles, those who live as exiles in Pontus, in Cappadocia, in Asia, and Bithynia." Then he goes on in chapter 2 to say, chapter 2, verse 11, "I urge you, brothers, as strangers and exiles to abstain from fleshly lusts." What he's saying is, "Christians, once you become a believer, once you're born again, you become a stranger to this world. You're now living as an exile in a strange place. You used to be of your father, the devil. You used to be under the kingdom of darkness but when you come to know Jesus Christ, you are delivered from the domain of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his beloved Son and you are forever his child, a citizen of his kingdom, which makes you while we're here in this world, an exile and a stranger." Hebrews 11, a verse we read a few weeks ago, it says in verse 13 that since they were looking for the heavenly city, they regarded themselves, they testified by looking to the heavenly city, not the land of Canaan primarily. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob testify that they were

strangers and exiles on the earth. That's what it is to be a Christian so we're not primarily interested in saving the planet, we don't think the planet needs saving in the sense of, like we're going to destroy it. God is able to keep it together but we're interested in God saving his elect, saving the souls of men.

So how do we live? Now, cultural, exiled, we also can experience, in a sense, let me say something of spiritual exile and I think these passages are going to be very relevant for us in this sense, that is, that the believer can find himself feeling, experiencing, something of a Babylonian exile in just the normal course of the Christian life. That through often our own sin, sometimes just the adversities that come and our ungodly responses or inappropriate responses to that, we can find ourselves feeling like we are farther from God's presence. We can sense that we're removed from his blessing. We can feel the oppression of our enemies: the world, and the flesh, and the devil. And we can feel that our prayers aren't able to get to him and what do you do in those moments? How do you respond? That's what these messages are about.

So individually, spiritually responding to exile and corporately as the people of God, how are we to live in this world for the Lord? 1 & 2 Kings is all about that calling and what we're going to see, the ultimate priority is made clear in the first 11 chapters of 1 Kings. You know, when you try to outline a book and thinking about it, often folks will put 1 Kings 1-11 as the reign of Solomon. You have the first couple of chapters are on David but really, it's transferring the kingdom to Solomon, and then Solomon's wisdom, and the Queen of Sheba in chapter 10, and then in chapter 11, Solomon's failures. But I think really the first 11 chapters, the spotlight is not on Solomon as much as it is upon the house of God. The temple of God is the star of the first 11 chapters. That is what Solomon was put in place to do, to build the temple.

So, I'm going to suggest to you that the ultimate priority that we see in 1 & 2 Kings that God was giving to his people in exile, he gave them this book. Now, the book was written over a period of time, probably several hundred years' different prophets recording events and writing things down because you have in a few different places a statement like this, "And so it is to this day." Like you're going to read one in a moment in chapter 8, verse 8, where it says that the poles that they carried the ark into the temple were so long that they were outside beyond the veil so that the poles could be seen outside the Holy of Holies, "as it is to this day," it says, 1 Kings 8:8.

Now, at the end of Kings when it was finally compiled by the Spirit-inspired editor redactor who put the book together and gave it at that point in time, it was no longer that way because the temple was in ruins. Do you see what I'm saying? And you have that in several different places along the way. Well, over hundreds of years different prophets are contributing to this book but the final version, the time that it was given to God's people, is during the exile, and so it's telling us, telling them how to live as exiles, how to be faithful to God, how to sing the song of the Lord in a foreign land. This is how you do it and the ultimate priority, he starts off at the beginning is, what you must understand is that there is one ultimate priority and that is that you worship God. That you worship God. No matter where you are, no matter what you're doing, the one thing that matters is

that you worship the living God; that life is to be lived in worship. This is why the temple is the star of 1 & 2 Kings and you're going to see it remains the star really throughout the whole book. It's the focus of the story of Solomon, his building of the temple, and then the rest of the book it continues to be the focus because the author of 1 & 2 Kings is continually showing how God's people are neglecting his temple. Over and over and over in a couple of phrases, we're going to see the high places, the sin of Jeroboam which we'll look at more as we go.

I want us to read, though, beginning at chapter 7, verse 51, the last verse of chapter 7 and the first 11 verses of chapter 8 and then skip down to verse 22 to verse 30. Okay, here we go. Chapter 7, verse 51,

51 Thus all the work that King Solomon performed in the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things dedicated by his father David, the silver and the gold and the utensils, and he put them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD.

1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' households of the sons of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David, which is Zion. 2 All the men of Israel assembled themselves to King Solomon at the feast, in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. 3 Then all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. 4 They brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the holy utensils, which were in the tent, and the priests and the Levites brought them up. 5 And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who were assembled to him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen they could not be counted or numbered. 6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim. 7 For the cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim made a covering over the ark and its poles from above. 8 But the poles were so long that the ends of the poles could be seen from the holy place before the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen outside; they are there to this day. 9 There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10 It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

This is the first time in over 400 years that the glory cloud has appeared. It appeared when they build the tabernacle, well, before even that. When they left Egypt, God led them, remember by a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire at night, and his cloud of glory dwelt over the tabernacle throughout the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, leading

them across into the land. Then God took up his glory cloud and did not reveal himself that way for more than 400 years but now his glory cloud has returned when the temple is built symbolizing what Solomon has done is perfect and wonderful and God's glory is with his people. God's glory is with his people at one place as it's always been since the nation of Israel was conceived in the exodus. It was there at the tabernacle, now it's at the temple in Jerusalem.

Now look at the importance of the place. Go down to verse 22,

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. 23 He said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, 24 who have kept with Your servant, my father David, that which You have promised him; indeed, You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it is this day. 25 Now therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You have promised him, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way to walk before Me as you have walked.' 26 Now therefore, O God of Israel, let Your word, I pray, be confirmed which You have spoken to Your servant, my father David. 27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! 28 Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; 29 that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, 'My name shall be there,' to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. 30 Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive."

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask now that you would have your way in our hearts, that you would grant us the fullness of your Spirit, clarity through your word, to see wondrous things in your law and to be granted repentance and faith to walk before you as true worshipers and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The outline is really two points this morning. The ultimate priority is, remember, the title and the first point is the question: what are we called to do? What are we called to do? The message given to God's people in exile is essentially that only one thing matters and that is worship. Now, one of the things that God is teaching them in exile as well through this is not just how to live but how they got where they are in the first place. That's one of the main themes of the book. How did we get in exile in the first place? We forgot the

ultimate priority. The reason that we're in misery and chains is because we forgot, we stopped, we chose not to worship God. We were idolaters. As the passage that Jess read earlier from Romans 1, the first chapter of Romans, we're all created to worship and if we won't worship God, we will worship the creature. If you don't worship the Creator, you will worship the creature. You will worship something. Everyone is a worshiper.

You see this just as you observe people's lives, observing the culture. You know, why is it that people get so emotionally involved in issues like, say for instance, why in the women's march, why was there such righteous indignation about things that the president had said or whatever and all that, I understand that, but I think one of the drivers behind that, especially the fact they excluded pro-life women, remember, pro-life women's groups that wanted to be involved in the march were excluded from leadership. Is the driving desire to protect a woman's, they call it a right to choose? They call it the right over her own body. We call it abortion and murder. And just this week was the 44th anniversary of Roe v. Wade when the Supreme Court legalized the murder of the unborn child. But why is it so intense then? Why can't it be just a debate and discussion, even a civil debate? Look at the facts. Let's talk about this honestly and openly. Because the woman's right to choose is a religious commitment. It's sacrosanct. It's holy. You're walking on holy ground when you begin to say, "No, that's not right." Now, of course we are walking on holy ground because we're saying what God says and they understand that, you see. They understand that their commitment, at some level they understand. It's not their minds are depraved but the intensity is because there's a resistance directly to God because they are worshiping the creature rather than the Creator.

The same thing is true with things like this whole gender issue, transgender. We realize that the issues that are confronting people are real and we need to be compassionate and we understand that believers can struggle with tendencies toward homosexuality or to doubting these kind of things, struggling because the culture is this way and because circumstances happen. We know that the one truth is that God is the Creator and he has made you the way he's made you and you're to give him thanks. In fact, that whole decline that we saw in Romans 1 that descends from idolatry to greater immorality and lust to homosexuality and to a depraved mind. It starts at this point when although they knew God, they did not honor him or give thanks. That was a turning point. They did not worship, give thanks, they did not acknowledge, "I thank you for how you've made me," and so the cascade downward begins there.

So the whole idea of this transgender thing, you know, such a small number of people relatively that are even in that community or that group, and yet it's become sacrosanct in the culture because it's a part of a faith commitment that says mankind is going to determine his destiny and he's going to make his decisions, man and womankind are going to make their decisions and they're not going to submit to God. So, they worship their right to choose. They worship themselves, their desires, their feelings, rather than give honor and glory to God.

Now, we're called to worship. We're created for worship. Genesis 1, God made us in his image and likeness to reflect something of his glory. That's what we're wired to do. We're

made to worship. We're made to give praise and thanks, in fact, people do this, the people worship. As I said earlier, you see it in those other areas but you see it in the worship of the sports hero, the worship of the entertainer, worshiping success, worshiping pleasure, worshiping sex, all these different things. The reason that it becomes so intense is because man can't just do things, man must worship.

Now, let's understand biblically what worship is. I think there is a very helpful definition John Piper has that worship is to gladly reflect back to God the radiance of his worth. To joyfully reflect back to God the radiance of his worth. That is, that man was made to look at God, to see his glory, and to enjoy him. Remember the catechism, first question: what is the chief end of man? To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. So to see God as he is, the beauty and splendor of his character, we're given eyes to be able to see him spiritually. This is how we were wired originally, created. Man, in sin can no longer see him as he needs to. But this is what we were created to do, to see God, to see his splendor, his glory, to delight in him and to praise him. We were made to do this the same way a horse is made to run.

That's what we're called to do. That's the one thing that we're called to do and when God grants you life and he gives you his light, he opens your heart and he redeems you, he brings you to himself, what are you to be about? That's the one thing you're to be about, worshiping God. Every moment of every day. That's why he's made himself known in creation so that we can see his eternal attributes, his invisible power, all the glory of what he's made, and as we see it, we worship. As we taste delicious food, we worship. "Lord, you made things to be like this. You made it so that salt and caramel and chocolate can taste so good together." We just discovered that, it seems like, this was a discovery like on the order of Columbus discovering the New World, putting salt in chocolate. Man, that's good! Who did that accidentally? Somebody thought they were putting sugar in and they put some salt in and they ate it and there you have it. I don't know about that. Okay, back to the point. Sorry, I got distracted.

The Lord made us that way and so we're to see these things and to worship him and that's what we're to be about every moment of every day. What are you supposed to do? The one thing you know that the will of God for you no matter where you find yourself, no matter what you're doing, no matter what happens to you, the one thing you know that is the will of God is that it is his will that you worship him. Give him praise. Calamity strikes, what is God's will for you? Worship. Remember the story of Job when everything fell apart in one day? When all his possessions just vanished? Remember how one servant comes and tells him, "Hey, the Sabeans attacked and they killed all your camels"? I can't remember exactly how it works out. The next, while he was still speaking, the text says, another servant comes in and says, "Hey, the Chaldeans attacked and they killed all your donkeys, they stole all your sheep." And then while he was still speaking, another servant comes in and while he's still speaking, another servant comes in, and finally the last servant says, "I was with your sons and daughters. They were having a feast in the house and the wind blew and it fell on them and they all died and all the servants, and I alone have escaped to tell you." He lost all his possessions, all his children, and what the Bible says is, "Job rose to his feet, tore his robe, fell down and worshiped." He

worshiped. We're told what he said as he worshiped God, "Naked came I into this world and naked shall I return. The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And the text right after that gives the affirmation that what he did was exactly right. In all these things, Job did not sin or accuse God of wrongdoing.

Worship. Worship God. That's what we're called to do every moment of every day. This means that in living in exile surrounded by injustice, ungodliness, that we must continually remind ourselves that the ultimate priority is to worship. Now, we can be about helping people, we can be about, as Ted mentioned, selling insurance but that guy was worshiping. Man, he was writing some great hymns as he was selling insurance on the way in the wagon, I guess, selling insurance. We're to be worshiping God. There are lots of causes that need our attention but nothing is more important than worshiping God. In fact, everything that we do should be an expression of our worship. "The reason that I'm doing this is because I believe that God is supremely worthy. He is supremely beautiful. His Son Jesus is all-glorious and therefore I'm doing this. I'm offering this to him."

We don't fix our eyes ultimately on changing the government, though it's important for Christians to be involved in politics. We don't fix our eyes on dealing exclusively just with the evils of society, though we need to be involved in those. While we're involved in those, the most important thing is to worship God. Even evangelism can sometimes become an end but if you really think about evangelism biblically, what are you doing? You're recruiting worshipers. You're taking people from being worshipers of themselves, worshipers of things that don't matter, and you're saying the one thing that you ought to put your focus on is the one true God who is worthy of all of your love. That's what Jesus said. What's the great commandment? Love God with all your soul, with all your might, with all your mind, with all your heart. That's worship.

Now, this means that a church service, it has implications for every church service. What's the purpose of the church service? It's to worship. Now we say that but we can forget. We can come to church, we can prepare messages to teach people how to live the Christian life and yet fail to worship. Do you see that? Here are some important things to learn about being a better husband, better wife. Here are some scriptural teachings about overcoming anxiety. If we do that and we fail to worship, we have missed the one thing that matters. Now, what is right is to worship and show how this is worshiping God in being a godly husband. And it changes. It's not just, "I'm going to be a better husband so I have a better response from my wife, I want to be a better husband because I want to do it for the glory of God. I want to worship you, Lord, in the way that I'm trying to be more attentive and a better leader. That's why I'm doing it." It seems like such a small difference and yet it makes such a huge difference in the outcome. Like the sighting of a gun, if your gun sight is off that far, you miss the target.

Now, what are we called to do? We're called to worship God. The second point this morning that is made in the book of Kings so clearly is, I'm going to use the question where not how: where are we called to do it? You could almost say how but I think the emphasis in Kings is on where. Where do we worship God? Where are we called to

worship God? The message given to God's people in exile, is extraordinary. They are only in Babylon. They don't have the freedom to go back to Israel but essentially what they're going to see, the message is: where do you worship God? You can only worship God in one place. At this point and time in history, you could only worship God at one geographical place and that is the place that the temple had formerly been. That spot was the holy ground where you worshiped God. This is the message of the book of Kings. It's extraordinary how emphatic that is in the book.

Now we saw it, looking at our text, in 8:27-30 when Solomon asked the question, he says, he made this wonderful temple but he says as he's praying, it's like it just hits him, 8:27, "will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" This house can't be the place where you dwell. And yet he understands this is the place God has appointed. Though God fills the heavens, though God is everywhere, you can't go from his presence, the place that he's appointed for man to meet him and to fellowship with him is one place and that is the temple in Jerusalem.

Look how the emphasis continues, verse 28, "Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, 'My name shall be there,' to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel," listen to it, "when they pray toward this place." Why only one place? This is where it's so important just to ask questions of the Lord. We come to his word, we come humbly, we come to learn, but it's so important to ask the obvious questions. "God, why is that a big deal? Why was it such a big deal for them to pray only toward one place? To meet you only toward one place?" I mean, after all, it was kind of hard to do that. He put his temple up on top of a mountain. Jerusalem is not an easy city to get to. There are ways into Jerusalem but in Israel they had to go up and down hills to get to the place to worship. Was that an oversight? Shouldn't we have had some drive-up worship centers set all around town? Well, that's exactly what the kings of Israel thought and God hated that. He hated that.

There is one place, now why? That's the question. Keep thinking about that, the question why, and I want to point out to you a couple...I mentioned earlier some emphases in the book and one of those emphases is the phrase, "the sins of Jeroboam." The sins of Jeroboam. The sins of Jeroboam or the way of Jeroboam. What you see as you read through the book of Kings, when you look at particularly the northern kingdom. Remember, the kingdom of Israel is up here, the kingdom of Judah is down here and the temple is in Jerusalem in the southern kingdom. God has said before the kingdoms are split apart, he says, "You're going to worship Me at only one place, Jerusalem. This is where you come to meet Me. And when you pray and you're up in the northern part of the kingdom, when you just pray, pray toward Jerusalem." Remember what Daniel did when he was in Babylon? Remember how he got thrown in the lions' den? He kept praying. What did he do? He opened his windows and prayed three times a day, praying toward

Jerusalem. He understood this. "Even though I can't be there, even though I'm removed by a thousand miles, I pray toward the place that God has ordained and he will hear me."

The sin of Jeroboam. We'll look at this a little more next time, but essentially, it's this: Jeroboam becomes the king of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom is under Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Those are a couple of great names for twin boys: Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Just write that down and save that for later. Actually, you wouldn't want to be named Jeroboam. It's kind of like naming your daughter Jezebel. I mean, I would advise against it. She's going to read the story one day.

So Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Jeroboam is the northern king, king of the northern kingdom, Rehoboam is the king of the southern kingdom. Jeroboam now possesses the northern kingdom, ten tribes of Israel, and he starts thinking in his own mind and decides, "You know, if I let my people go down as God has commanded at Passover and Pentecost and Tabernacles and any time they want to make a sacrifice, if I let them go down to Jerusalem, their hearts are going to be taken away from me and they'll want to follow the southern king so I'm going to solve this." So he makes two places of worship. He doesn't just do one, he does two: one in Dan and one in Bethel, sort of like one in the northern part of the northern kingdom of Israel, Dan, and one in the southern part of the northern kingdom of Israel, Bethel. So, on the way to Jerusalem, hey, you might as well stop off at Bethel and not go all the way to Jerusalem. And he even comes up with a feast, he makes up a new feast. He installs priests of his own making. At these two places of worship, he makes golden calves for each place. You can see Jeroboam is not being advised well. A golden calf, really?

But the whole point and we'll see this and I encourage you to read 1 Kings, the end of chapter 12 and chapter 13. We'll be looking at 13 some next time. But what happened was he does what in his own mind and his own heart makes sense to him. "Hey, we can worship Yahweh." He's not advising them to worship other gods, he's saying, "Worship the God who brought you out of Egypt. Here he is. Here is a golden calf. Worship Yahweh with these golden calves at Dan or Bethel." God calls that the sin of Jeroboam and like a refrain of a hymn, it comes throughout the rest of the book of Kings. This is what he'll say about whether it be of Baasha or Omri or Ahab, "He walked in the sins of his father Jeroboam. He encouraged my people to worship somewhere other than Jerusalem. He walked in the way of Jeroboam." That's like the most horrific indictment of a king. That's the northern kings, the sins of Jeroboam.

The southern kings, the kings of Judah, after Rehoboam, a bunch of kings in Judah. There are half a dozen or so decent good kings and most of them in the south are also not so great, but one of the interesting refrains in the south or key term is the term "high place" or "high places." We find it even from Solomon in chapter 3, verses 2 and 3, that he worshiped God at a high place, not at the tabernacle. Then you find as you read through the book, even good kings like Asa. Turn with me to 1 Kings 15:9-14. This is one of the highlights in the book, one of those good kings among all these dozens of kings. One of the good kings, verse 9, 1 Kings 15:9, "So in the twentieth year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Asa began to reign as king of Judah. He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem; and

his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father. He also put away the male cult prostitutes from the land and removed all the idols which his fathers had made. He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image and burned it at the brook Kidron. But the high places were not taken away; nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the LORD all his days." You read that about Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Amaziah, Jotham. It talks about they walked in the ways of their father David, nevertheless the high places were not removed. What were the high places? The high places were places you could go up and burn incense or make a sacrifice and they were on every high hill around Judah. Somebody setting up shop to allow you to worship God somewhere other than Jerusalem.

So high places and the sins of Jeroboam are like a refrain saying, "There is one place that you can worship God and it is Jerusalem and God is very very serious about that." Why? Why? Because you don't make up the way, you and I don't make up the way that we come to God. It's not up to us to determine, "I think this is how I should come to the living God." God sets the terms on how he will be worshiped. In fact, you see that when you read that passage on Jeroboam. It says things like this, "the calves which he made at the high places which he made, on the day which he devised in his own heart."

We don't worship God according to our own ideas, we come and worship God according to what he's laid down in his word and the one place, one place, one place, is Jerusalem. Why is that? Not just because he determines the terms, it's because he was teaching us something very important way back then. There was one place you could worship God before there was a temple and that was the tabernacle, remember the tent of meeting that Moses made. And then once the tent of meeting was replaced by the temple, the one place you could worship God was the temple. Then when the temple was destroyed, the one place you could worship God was the ground where the temple had been. Then when they rebuilt the temple, the one place you could worship God was the temple, the rebuilt temple. And then one day, a young man and a young woman walked into that temple carrying a baby boy and they dedicated that baby in the temple and the people that were there witnessed the replacement of the physical temple of God for the spiritual temple. John writes this in John 1:14, "the Word," the eternal Word, "became flesh, and dwelt among us." Literally the word "dwelt" in the Greek is "tabernacled; pitched his tent." What John is saying is that when Jesus, when God became a man, when the one who created the world became a man, it was as if now the temple was the flesh and blood of the man Jesus Christ.

What does the New Testament make clear? There is only one place a sinner can find a relationship with God. There is not a multitude of places. It doesn't matter what you think about it. It doesn't matter about what somebody else thinks about it. God has said there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and the Old Testament was testifying to this. God is going to send one Savior, one man, one temple, and Jesus is that temple.

Now, you and I are called to worship. We are called to worship every day. Where do you worship? You worship at the foot of Jesus. How do you become a worshiper? God is seeking worshipers who worship him in spirit and truth. Jesus said this to the woman at the well, "It is no longer at Jerusalem, it's no longer about where geographically, it's Me. You come to Me and I make you a true worshiper." You come to Jesus and you acknowledge your sin, your inability to come to God. You go to him and you ask him who said, "I am the door." He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father but by Me." You go to Jesus, repent of your sins, place your faith in his finished work, his perfect life, his atoning sacrifice, his glorious resurrection, and you become a true worshiper of the living God.

Now, as Christians on a daily basis, what do we need to do? We need to worship God. You know, you find yourself in some sense of exile: you've messed things up, you're not walking with the Lord, you feel distant. What do you do? Go to Jesus. "I will arise and go to Jesus," we sang just a moment ago. What do we need to do every moment of every day? Arise and go to Jesus. "I don't know what to do in this circumstance. I don't know how to deal with this. I don't know." Worship God. Go to Jesus. That's where it all changes, at the foot of Jesus.

So we come together on Sunday mornings, what do we need? We need to be saying in our hearts what the Greeks said when they came. I mean, what is it that makes a church truly a church? The Greeks, what did they say when they came to Jesus' disciples? "Sirs, we would see Jesus." If we're called to be worshipers and the reason we get together is to remind ourselves to keep worshiping, what do we need more than anything else? We don't need tips on how to live and be happy, we need to see Jesus. When we counsel one another and sometimes we're talking about practical things, the main thing that ought to be driving us is helping each other to look to Jesus. And we can forget this, as conservatives we can forget that it's not just about felt needs and all that that so many others are wrapped up in. We can get into thinking about godliness and righteousness and forget to worship and love God and you will fall in that trap unless you're continually going to Jesus and saying, "Jesus, I need you. I'm getting distracted by all the things and I just need to worship God."

So go to him. Calamity strikes, if you've got a situation like Job, and I hope that doesn't ever happen to any of us, but if it does, praise his name. But do you know what the first thing you need to do is you need to go to Jesus. You need in your heart to say, "Lord Jesus, I'm called to worship God. I don't know how in this circumstance. I'm coming to you. Help me. I need you, Jesus." Just going to him, he is the way. That is the one thing that we're to be about and it makes everything else fall into place. Get this one thing wrong and everything else is askew. So no matter what we do, where we find ourselves, our one business is to worship God and to worship God by looking to Jesus, going to him. Isn't it wonderful to have a Savior that is ready to help us worship God? That's what it is. We don't have to get ourselves ready, just go to Jesus. You say, "I don't feel like worshipping." Go to Jesus. "I don't see how I could possibly get myself..." Go to Jesus. He is able.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for creating us to be worshipers. We praise you and affirm the rightness, goodness of your design. Everything you do is perfect. You have made mankind to be worshipers. Lord, we ask that you would help us to truly worship you in spirit and in truth, to truly love you and treasure you, to see the glory of who you are, and to make that our business day after day to see the wonder of who you are. Help us and then help us, Lord, to help other people to see that the things they're worshiping, the creature, things of their own invention, are worthless and nothing in comparison to the one true God. Help us join you in recruiting people to be true followers and worshipers of your holiness and your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.