

The Crucial Importance of Spiritual Leadership

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Bible Text: 1 Kings; 2 Kings
Preached on: Sunday, February 19, 2017

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Kings 18 for my Scripture reading for the point we'll start at this morning. We're continuing to look at the books 1 & 2 Kings as a whole. We've been looking at those for the last three Sundays. Today is our fourth Sunday, themes from the book of Kings that apply to our lives. We talked about the fact that the book of Kings was written to the people of God in exile. They actually received this revelation, the book, the finished product, when they were in exile in Babylon and so the book was given to them to show them how they got where they were and how they should live, what they should do in response. It was a guide to show us how to live during times of great spiritual difficulty and oppression, much of which is self-inflicted.

So we've seen in the last few weeks, our first message there, we saw that the first major theme of the book of Kings is the issue of worship. The reason they were in exile was because they had not worshiped God truly as he wills to be worshiped. They had departed from the Lord. They had not worshiped him where he chose to be worshiped, that is Jerusalem. We saw that that was indicative that there is only one place that sinners can go to worship, the place God designates. At that point in redemptive history, it was the city of Jerusalem and the temple in the city that was to typify that the one place that sinners can meet God, God designates. We don't make our own way to God. He determines the way and the one place that he willed for man to meet, sinful men to meet God, would be the true temple, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only place that sinners meet God. So we saw that and so that returning to true worship and worshiping God as he intends is something that is so important for us. When we see the world deteriorating around us, what should we do? Don't lose heart, worship. Go to Christ.

Then we saw the second week that another major theme in the book of Kings is the role of the prophets and the word of the Lord itself. One of the key phrases in the book of Kings, 49 times the phrase, "the word of the LORD." We see that the word of the Lord is active, determining history as you read the book of Kings; that the prophets speak the word of the Lord and then what they said happens, so that that message was telling the people in exile that what we need is the word of the Lord, and the one thing that will help us truly worship is the word of the Lord. We need it as much as we need our bread, as much as we need our breath.

Then last time we saw that another major theme was the role of miracles in the ministry of Elijah and Elisha and how that was an authenticating gift of God to authenticate the prophetic message, the word of the Lord; that it was to help us to see that the word is that which contains all of the power and that really though, the focus is on the spiritual miracles.

Now with that said, we come to a fourth message today, another important theme in the book of Kings that helps us know how we should live and the title of the message is "The Crucial Importance of Spiritual Leadership." The crucial importance of spiritual leadership. As you read the books of Kings, 1 & 2 Kings, what you see is in addition to what I just laid out in those first three messages, what you see is an evaluation again and again of a king: kings of the north, kings of the south. Remember that the book of Kings starts, it opens with David still on the throne, King David over the united monarchy, Israel. It's called the name Israel, the 12 tribes are united under one kingship, one king, David, the glory days.

Then his son Solomon comes and we see that in the beginning of the book of Kings and Solomon builds the temple and they are still united under one king. It's the united monarchy. Then Solomon's son Rehoboam, because of Solomon's sin, God judges the people and splits the kingdom into two. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, sees 11 of the tribes depart from him so that only Judah remains with the son of David, the grandson of David, Rehoboam, and 11 tribes are now in the north, the northern kingdom of Israel and it is called Israel and the southern kingdom is called Judah. These are the two groups of people that really make up God's people at this point in history: Israel and Judah. And the rest of the book of Kings from 1 Kings 12 to the end of 2 Kings 25 recounts the history of those two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. So you have, we have noted that there are 20 kings actually of the northern kingdom, Israel, beginning with Jeroboam and ending with Hoshea, and there are 20 kings in the south beginning with Rehoboam and ending with Jehoiakim, Zedekiah. Twenty both. Now, there are more years in the south because the northern kingdom was wracked by more turmoil, more assassinations, more ungodliness.

But it's interesting as you read through the book each king is evaluated by God and you'll see refrains running throughout the book, two refrains. Basically there are two prototypes: you're either like David, a king honoring God and bringing blessing to his people, or you're like Jeroboam, a wicked king whom God was very angry with and judged and removed his line from the face of the earth. But you'll see that refrain running throughout the book. Fifteen times, well, counting Jeroboam, 15. Actually 14 of those 19 kings that followed Jeroboam in the north, 14 of the 19 we're told in the evaluation period about them, "He walked in the sins of Jeroboam. He walked in the way of Jeroboam. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. He walked in the way of Jeroboam."

Now, there is only a handful of good kings. There are really four that get a good grade from the Lord: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah in the south. Of the 20 kings in the south, only four are godly kings who are like David and really two of those four are really like David: Hezekiah and Josiah. But that's what marks the great leader of God's people,

he's like David and we're going to see that what it means to be like David is to follow the Lord with all of his heart and it means to be controlled by the word of God, submitted to the word of God. That's what made David great and that's what brought blessing to the people. Jeroboam did what was right in his own eyes. He lived according to his own understanding and because of that he brings devastation and the kings after him did the same thing. Idolatry, immorality, moral decline, social unrest, spiritual devastation is what happens when you turn away from the word of God.

Now what we're going to see is that in this book we have a prototype of what spiritual leadership should look like and the tremendous impact it has, good spiritual leadership. And we also have an example of bad spiritual leadership and the tremendous impact it has.

Now, it's important when we interpret a passage like this to think carefully about it. Somebody might look at this book and think they could make application to the president of the United States, for instance, you know, a godly president versus an ungodly president of the United States. That's really not the correct interpretation of this passage at all because Israel was God's people, his theocracy, his people that belonged to him. So the actual appropriate interpretive adjustment is that the people of God today are the church, not the nation, and so that good kings, bad kings, relates to good shepherds, bad shepherds in the church. And what we see here is the importance of placing yourself under good spiritual leadership. How do you know when you should leave a church? This passage speaks to that. This book gives insight into that. What are the marks of sound spiritual leadership that will bring blessing to your family? What should we pray for that God would give us in our leaders. This book lays it out.

So, the crucial importance of spiritual leadership, that's the title of the message and I want us to look at one of the ringing beautiful portraits that's in the book. There are really two. I said really the only two kings that get the praise of the text as being just like David are Hezekiah and Josiah and we're reading about Hezekiah. We're going to read beginning at verse 1 to 8 of chapter 18, 2 Kings 18.

1 Now it came about in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. 3 He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. 4 He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan. 5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. 6 For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. 7 And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered. And he rebelled

against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 8 He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you would help us now as we come to your word. We recognize, Lord, our great need of grace, the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. Help us to spiritually take our shoes off, we're on holy ground, and may you speak to us, may you change us by the power of your precious word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, what I want us to look at and we're kind of expositing the book of Kings in four messages, 47 chapters in four messages, that's 11 chapters a week. That's a pretty good pace for me especially. So this is going to be the last message from Kings. But we're looking at the big broad themes. I would love to preach through the book and go chapter by chapter some time. I really look forward to that and wish I could do that now but we're going to focus on this fourth theme today and see how it applies to us. The crucial importance of spiritual leadership, that what we see is that as the king went in that day, so the people went. That when there was a godly king who turned to the Lord with all of his heart and he obeyed the word of God, it brought blessing, spiritual light and blessing to the people and when there was a bad king that turned away from the word of God, it brought great devastation spiritually to the people because the Lord has made us such that we are, the Bible's favorite metaphor for his people is sheep. We're sheep and we need to be shepherded and so the kings of Israel were called shepherds. He raised up David to shepherd his people and, of course, he typified the Lord Jesus Christ and so that the main point really of the book of Kings is that you and I need a shepherd. We need to be shepherded by the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's one of the themes that is unfolding in the Old Testament. As you look at how God deals with a nation, his people of Israel, basically what he's teaching them is, you know, in the book of Judges, remember everyone does what is right in his own eyes. In those days there was no king. They did what was right in their own eyes. So the message of the book of Judges is: we need a King. We need God's King.

Then the message of Samuel is the people wanted a king for the wrong reasons but God wanted to give them a king after his heart. The message of Samuel is we need a king like David. And the message of Kings continues to be we need a king like David but one greater than David. It ends with the expectation that there is a king coming. The end of the book after they've been exiled, the real interesting passage in 2 Kings 25, Jehoiachin is in prison in Babylon for 37 years. There is nothing notable about him except he was a bad king when he was in Judah. He is taken in exile and there in 2 Kings 25, the author spends about five verses telling us that Jehoiachin was released from prison by King Nebuchadnezzar, by the Babylonian king, brought to sit at the king's table, given the best position of all the peoples that he had subjugated. Babylon was dominating the world but he lifted this small little kingdom of Judah, this king above everyone else and he gave him regular portions of food from his table. Isn't that an interesting thing to put there?

Wow, he was number 1 among the prisoners. That's really what he's saying. What is that talking about? God is preserving the Davidic line. He is setting it apart even in the darkest place of Babylon, setting it apart and the message is: keep your eyes on the line of David because the King is coming. We need the King, we need Jesus to come and so that's what they were to do.

Now, so God is telling us we need a King like Jesus and that's what happens when a person is born again. They repent, believe the Gospel, see that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins, that in his death he bore your wrath that you deserve. God treated him as if he had lived your sinful life, my sinful life, that he might treat us as if we lived his righteous life. And when that happens, when someone is truly converted, they surrender to Jesus not just as Savior but as Lord, as King, so that you surrender to his kingship, now you're saying this is how you live in God's presence. You need God's King, the Lord Jesus Christ. So the message of Kings is about that.

Now, once you become a follower of Jesus Christ, though, an interesting thing we see in the New Testament is you and I still need shepherding. The passage Jess read earlier, 1 Peter 5, the exhortation to the elders to oversee the sheep, to shepherd the flock. We still need to be shepherded. Every one of us does. One of the great joys in my life has been to lead this church from being a traditional Southern Baptist Church with just a deacon board and majority rule kind of thing to being more biblical in its church government, by God's grace, and so that we have elder leadership. And one of the real blessings for me is I am submitted to the other elders. They are shepherding me. We need that. I need that.

So that's one of the things that's going on here. So what is it that we need in shepherds? How does this book speak to that? What kind of shepherds do we need? We need, essentially we're going to look at two points today and there is going to be a little sub almost point in between. So it's like 2 ½. The two main points, the first point is the devastating effect of bad leadership. The devastating effect of bad leadership and two sub points under this main point. Now, two main points, two sub points under each main point. Okay?

The first point: the devastating effect of bad leadership. The first sub point: the character of bad leadership. We're going to talk about the character of the bad leadership and the second sub point will be the consequence of bad leadership. But the character first. The character of bad leadership. Look with me back at 1 Kings. We're going to go through the book of Kings and look at some different passages to see this.

1 Kings 14. Back to 1 Kings 14 and we're going to see that the character of bad leadership, first of all, is shown to us in Jeroboam that he was not like David. In verses 7 to 11 of 1 Kings 14, here Jeroboam, the king who was the first king of the north who committed the great sins that then all the other kings of the north are compared to and said they walked in the sins of Jeroboam, this is the guy and here is the Lord giving an evaluation of what he's done and pronouncing judgment on him through a prophet. Jeroboam's son had gotten sick and he sent his wife to go to the prophet Ahijah, a prophet of the Lord, to inquire if his son would get well and he said, "disguise yourself so the

prophet won't know that you are my wife and just go down and see what you can find out about the king's son," not your son. Well, when she starts walking in the door, Ahijah says, "What brings you here, wife of the king?" And by the word of the Lord he pronounces judgment on Jeroboam to his wife to take this message back. He basically says, "When you enter the city, your son is going to die. When you cross into Samaria, your son is going to die," and God's going to remove every male descendant of Jeroboam from the face of the earth because God hates what Jeroboam has done.

Now verse 7, "Go, say to Jeroboam, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over My people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you--yet you have not been like My servant David,'"" what is David like? "Who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight; you also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back-- therefore behold, I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone." That's how God feels about what Jeroboam did. That's pretty serious.

The first thing, he was not like David but he led the people into idolatry. And you remember, I'm going to summarize what we find back in 1 Kings 12 to tell you what Jeroboam actually had done because in some sense it didn't seem, it seemed like a pretty small thing at the first because what he basically did, remember when he takes over the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah, the temple that God has said the one place you're to worship is in Judah, it's in Jerusalem, and he takes over the northern kingdom and he's worried that his people are going to have to go down into the southern kingdom to worship Yahweh. He thinks that's going to be a bad thing for national unity and he's going to end up getting killed by the people.

So he in his own mind devises a plan. This is the kind of language that you see in 1 Kings 12. He decides to make places of worship to franchise the temple and he makes two franchises, one in Bethel and one in Dan, the southern half of the northern kingdom. Before you get to Jerusalem, you've got to practically go by Bethel so you might as well stop there and save the trip. And for those of you so far to the north, go to Dan. And he makes places of worship and he sets up feasts and he calls priests that aren't the Levites according to what God had said how you're to worship, he just makes up priests. And you can almost see in his heart, I mean, but he tells them, "Worship the Lord who brought you out of Egypt." He's telling them to worship the one true God. He's a little confused because, remember, he builds golden calves for them too. But his heart was not to take them away from Yahweh, his heart was to have them worship in a way that was better suited according to what he thought in his own heart. That is the wicked sin of Jeroboam that God hates because God knows that when you miss it this far at that point, you're going to go farther and farther until you fall away completely. This is exactly what happened.

The character of bad leadership is he leaned on his own understanding. It seemed to him a small thing to make a slight change in the way God said to be worshiped. "Surely the Lord is okay with this." I'm sure he reasoned from principles that the Lord would understand that the people, "He has given me this kingdom. I've got to keep it together." So he reasoned in his own mind from principles of logic rather than the truths of Scripture. You start with the truths of Scripture and then you logically flow from there. But the key verse in that section or key phrase, he talks about the feasts in which he had devised in his own heart. That's what God hated. That's the character of bad leadership which will have devastating effect. This is where people don't truly give their people the word of God, they offer instead their own insights, their own genius into the problems they see that people have. Well-meaning, well-intended in many cases, but deadly. Hated by God.

The consequence of bad leadership. That's a character of bad leadership. Leans on his own understanding; does not bow to Scripture and make Scripture the guide and rule of everything. The consequence of bad leadership. As I said earlier, the departure at first appears small. Worship the Lord, just worship him in Bethel, worship him in Dan. Just worship not in Jerusalem. Just worship him not exactly where he said to. Just worship him, just not exactly how he said to. And this departure from the word of God, such is the heart, the sinful heart of man that if you take us away from the word of God, you bring about an avalanche of ungodliness over time and the people that try to lead God's people like that don't understand what God says about the nature of sin, the darkening of the human mind. We must have the word of God directing us at every step. Even as redeemed believers, we need the word of God to guide us, to show us how to live, how to think, what to believe.

It goes from bad to worse. You read in 1 Kings 16, turn over to 1 Kings 16:30, king Ahab, and you'll see again how the walking in the sense of Jeroboam. Look at verse 30, "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him." Here's the evaluation I was talking about. Look at what he says next, "It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him." What happened was the departure from the way that God said to worship led to greater idolatry. They finally turned away or quickly turned away from worshipping Yahweh to worshipping Baal. That's what happens. When you don't listen to God when he says how to worship, you will soon forget who to worship.

So the consequences are devastating. Ahab's son, Ahaziah, again terrible and then this one after another in the catalog of the history of the northern kingdom and finally it comes to an end in the exile in 722. God has had enough and so he sends the Assyrians in and they devastate the northern kingdom of Israel. Erasing it from the face of the earth.

Look with me at 2 Kings 17 now. We're looking at the end of the northern kingdom and I want you to note how bad it is and what God says about what really brought this about. Verse 6, "In the ninth year of Hoshea," this is the last king of the northern kingdom, in his ninth year, "the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria." Verse 7, "Now this came about," why did this come about?" Because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD had driven out before the sons of Israel, and in the customs of the kings of Israel which they had introduced. The sons of Israel," verse 9, "did things secretly which were not right against the LORD their God." He talks about they built for themselves high places; they worshiped the Asherah; they worshiped Baal; they made their sons pass through the fire, that is, they did human sacrifice. How evil the heart of man becomes once he departs from the Lord.

Then it says, he sums up this whole discussion of what happened, though, by remembering the beginning, the first point of departure. Look at verse 21, or actually look at verse 20, "The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight." He's summarizing what he did. He cast them out of his sight. Look at verse 21, "When He had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam," back to the very beginning, "the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam," look what he did, "drove Israel away from following the LORD and made them commit a great sin." The reason they are in the ash heap of history is Jeroboam drove them away. It didn't seem like to Jeroboam he was doing that but that's what he did. He drove them away.

"The sons of Israel," verse 22, "walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them until the LORD removed Israel from His sight." The devastating impact of bad leadership, what happens is when you place yourself under bad spiritual leadership, you are inviting disaster. When the word of God is not being followed, not being applied to our hearts regularly, what's going to happen is sin is going to grow, idolatry is going to grow in the heart, and more and more ungodliness is going to grow. It's inevitable. We need the word of God applied every moment of every day.

Now, I want to move on quickly. We're going to come back and talk a little bit about what bad leadership looks like in a moment but that first main point: the devastating effect of bad leadership, we saw it in its character and its consequence. This is the half-point, 1 ½ now, not 2, because the two points are the devastating effect of bad leadership and the liberating impact of good leadership. We're going to get to that in a minute, in a moment, but before that a little excursus on 1 ½.

It's interesting that there are described in the book not good leaders or bad leaders but ambivalent leaders. There are four of them, really. You could say maybe six, four to six: Jehoash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Jehoshaphat, Asa. Asa and Jehoshaphat I think are in between. They are almost good leaders. It's hard to categorize them. You almost have to add another category. The two great leaders are Hezekiah and Josiah. All the kings of Israel are bad; 12 of the kings of Judah are bad; 32 of the 40, F. Four clearly are in this

ambivalent area: Jehoash, Amaziah, Azariah and Jotham. They are kings of Judah and it says things like this: they did right in the sight of the Lord.

Look with me at 2 Kings 14. If you're still in 2 Kings 18, turn back to 2 Kings 14, we were in 17, 2 Kings 14:3-4. I wish they had just not had 1 & 2 Kings, they had one King and there was 47 chapters, right? It would be so much easier. Right before I came up, my Bible, I had marked 1 Kings 18 and I had to, "Oh, I've got to turn to 2 Kings, I need to read 2 Kings 18." It's going to be really confusing when I start reading about Elijah and I meant to read about Hezekiah. I'm glad I shared that with you so I could distract further.

Okay, 2 Kings 14. I'm showing you the ambivalence of some kings, that they were not evil but they were not fully good. Look at with me at 2 Kings 14:1, "In the second year of Joash son of Joahaz king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah became king. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem. He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father; he did according to all that Joash his father had done." He was like his father Joash who was pretty good. He did right in the sight of the Lord but he wasn't like David either. Look at verse 4, "Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed." They allowed for worship other places than Jerusalem even in the kingdom of Judah.

And there are ambivalent kings like this in the book of Kings and so I think this says that there can be spiritual leaders that have it mostly right but they're not quite where they need to be. They are missing it here and you need to be careful with them and if you find yourself in a place where the only church that you can find is of that character, well, you've got to go to the best church you can find. You've got to be a part of God's people and if there's a church that believes the Gospel and is preaching the Gospel, then that's enough. But be aware that you need to pray for them to go on and become like their father David, faithful to the word. I mean, you think about this, it also applies to people like you read. Not just your church leaders but the books you read because, in a sense, when you read a book, you're looking to someone else to teach you the word of God, a Christian book, right?

So there are a lot of people that I read and that we read that maybe we don't agree with as much, that we might put in this category of really good in some ways but some things to watch out for. I quote C. S. Lewis a lot, I would put him in that category. A lot to offer, a lot of good stuff but there are some real problems he has too. Significant things. You are aware of that. You are extra vigilant in that circumstance. J. I. Packer, I love some of Packer's books. He has written some of the best books in certain areas out there but there are some problems with Packer. I mean, he is confused about the relationship of Catholicism and the Protestant church, I mean, the true Bible teaching church and the Gospel. How can that be? Well, it's sort of like these ambivalent kings. So when we see that, take the good, sort of eat the meat, spit out the bones. It doesn't mean you don't relate to those people, love those people, but you encourage them to pursue the Scriptures more faithfully.

Now, the second major point. So that's the end of that half point. The second major point is: the liberating impact of good leadership. We considered the devastating effect of bad leadership, the liberating impact of good leadership. We're going to have two sub points here too: the character and the consequence. The character of good leadership is seen in the example of David and we see it at the very beginning of the book, or early on in the book.

Let's look at 1 Kings 9:4. This is where the Lord, after Solomon builds the temple, appears to him a second time and he says to him in verse 4, "As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked," how did David walk? "In integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances." You see, David walked in integrity of heart and uprightness. He kept all of God's statutes and ordinances. He sought to obey the Lord fully. Now, he wasn't perfect. We know that, we know about Bathsheba, but the direction and tenor of his life was to submit to the Lord and his word. That is what makes the distinguishing essential characteristic of good leadership. If you find that, you have found good leadership.

Now, we're always reforming, we're always supposed to be always changing our theology and our life in light of Scripture. Reforming my life on a daily basis, reforming your life on a daily basis if you love the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds daily. And so it is with leadership. Nobody is going to have it right. Nobody does. I mean, if you picked your spiritual hero, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, you sit under their ministries and you see their church and they've got problems too, but the direction of their life meets this criteria; they are seeking to do everything they can to be faithful to the word of God. And when you find that, you have found the essence of the ministry that God will bless. So, when you find that, that's what needs to be in all of the elders of the church because if that is the character of the elders of the church, then that will become the character of the people in the church.

You see it in the passage I read earlier about Hezekiah, 2 Kings 18. He clung to the Lord. He did not depart from following him but kept his commandments which the Lord had commanded Moses. He says this after he told us he did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father David had done. It wasn't just part, all that his father David had done. Hezekiah had a heart like that. He clung to God, clung to his commandments.

2 Kings 22, the other great benediction and blessing on a king is on Josiah. We read that he becomes king at eight years old and the Lord does that work when he's 26 or 25. They find the word of God. The word of God had been lost in the temple. They didn't know the Bible anymore. Things had gotten so bad spiritually because this is what happens. This is in the southern kingdom. They had departed so far from the Lord that Hezekiah, they find the book of the law in the temple. Hilkiah the priest comes and tells him, "We found this book." The priest doesn't even know about the Bible. And he reads the book in Hezekiah's presence and Hezekiah tears his robes in brokenness as he hears the word of

the Lord read. Then he brings about a great revival and repentance and restoration to the people and roots out all kinds of ungodliness, unimaginable ungodliness.

I mean, just to give you an example: they read the book, he hears it, his heart is broken, he then calls an assembly, a national assembly and Hezekiah reads the law to the people and he makes a covenant with the people, with God, and he calls the people to make a covenant. "We're going to follow the Lord. We're going to turn back to the Lord." And then what he does is he starts cleaning house. He goes into the temple and he brings out idols that are in the temple of Yahweh. He brings them out and he burns them and he takes the ungodly priests of Baal that are in the temple and he kills them, he puts them to death. He brings out the male cult prostitutes that are in the temple of Yahweh. They borrowed the wickedness of the people around them so that that ungodliness is a part of the worship that happens in God's holy temple. He tears down all of the high places and he kills all of the prophets and he goes all the way up to Bethel like it had been prophesied, and he destroys, he razes that place to the ground. He destroys the altar. He finds some bones in the grave there and he says, "Whose bones are these?" They say, "This is the man of God," one of the prophet says, "This is the man of God who prophesied that you would come and do this." Remember when we looked at 1 Kings 13? He prophesied that God would raise up a man named Josiah. "The word of the Lord said a man named Josiah will come and destroy you, this temple." And sure enough that's what happened. He cleaned house. He put away the spirits and the mediums that were all over Israel, the spiritists and the mediums.

This is how bad it got among the people of God when they departed from the word of God. But what was it that changed it all? It's when they recovered the word of God. When the word of God in the hand of the shepherd of God was applied to the people of God, purity flowed. True worship was restored. Righteousness was exalted. Through the word of God, people were being set free, liberated from the hopelessness and bondage and despair that comes from that kind of ungodliness. So what we see is that what we need in leadership is a commitment to the word of God above everything else; a trust in the word of God that it is the only thing that can truly keep us worshiping Jesus and loving him. It's the only thing that can purify our souls.

So you need to pray for us as elders in this church that we will be people like David, that we will not tremble from anything other than dishonoring the Lord and being unfaithful to his word. And to pray that God will keep raising up people. I mean, praise God for the people he has raised up in the last 50 years, people like John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul I mentioned, preaching the word of God. I mean, how many people can sit here in this room if we asked you to raise hands and say how much you've been ministered to. Some of you were brought really out of darkness. Maybe you were a believer but you were wandering around in a church going sort of nowhere and all the fads of the day dominating your life and you started listening to John MacArthur and you started to realize the word of God makes all the difference. I need to be where the word of God is taught. Praise God for that. He is doing that all over the world. He is raising up a standard all over the world. I mean, seminaries now in places like Italy where people taught at the Masters Seminary are now teaching people in Italy, of all places, to preach the word of

God. Isn't that awesome? And all that wickedness and bondage because Italy, the place where supposedly the church, it's just like what Josiah found there: the incredible wickedness and ungodliness that happens when you depart from the word.

And when the word is lifted up, what happens when the word is correctly taught, it's preached? Then what happens is people see Jesus and they go to Jesus and he becomes everything. This is one of the red flags that shows you about any false teaching or false movement is, Jesus is not exalted and lifted up. When anything else competes with Jesus, you know there's a problem. But when the word of God is clearly taught, Jesus is exalted. He is the one way, he is the one person, he is everything.

Now, how do we apply this in a little more clarity even down to how we help friends around us? One of the things, a verse that I was thinking about this week as I was preparing this message is a verse that is often misunderstood, Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." A lot of times people use that, misuse it to say that you've got to have a 10-year plan for your church, a five-year plan. You've got to have this, cast a vision. It's really borrowed from the business world. I'm not saying there is not a place for planning. The Bible says we should plan but that's not what that verse is talking about. Good point, bad text. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," really means this: where there is no prophetic revelation, the people perish. They cast off restraint. Where there is no sense, "Thus says the LORD," in the church, when there really is the word of God is absent from the church, what happens is people cast off restraint and go into greater ungodliness. He goes on and it shows it in the second half of the verse, "How blessed is he who attends to thy law." You go to the word of God. That's what we need.

So, this is why it's so important for us in preaching, and this is how you evaluate the preaching of a church, is the preaching ministry and teaching ministry, is it truly trying to unpack what God has said in his word? Even if someone is taking a topical message like this is a topical message, in a sense, right? But is the topic being handled by letting the word drive the message? The emphasis of the Scripture, is that what's driving the message? Many people, most churches today, the driving force is the pastor's creativity. It's what he thinks are the problems that are confronting people. It's what he reads in the pop culture. It's what he perceives to be the felt needs of the people. But the felt needs of the people, God is not interested in dealing with the felt needs of the people. Jeroboam was interested in dealing with the felt needs of the people. "It's really hard to get all the way to Jerusalem. I know you guys would love to have a place you could stop on the way and not have to go all the way to Jerusalem. Here's your felt need I'm dealing with." That's not the way. You start with the word of God and you let the word of God direct.

So the job of the preacher or the Bible teacher is to start with the text, and to listen to the text, and to hear the text, and to study the text, and to pray over the text, and to contemplate how the text, what the true interpretation, the meaning of the text. What's the theme? What's the message of the text? And that should be directly related to the message of the sermon. The Bible, the message flows out of. This is what exposition means or exegesis is. It's to lead out the meaning of the text so that people can see it. The main

points. This is what truly expository preaching is. The main points of the message come from the text, not from something else.

And when that happens, there is a sense in which, and another thing I encourage young guys that are preaching, I say, "Listen, one of the reasons it takes 45 minutes at least to preach a good message is because, I mean, maybe it's because you're like me and you struggle to be, I can't say anything short. Okay, so I understand there is some personal stuff. Some guys can do it in much less time that I can." But I said this, "A lot of times people shortchange this important aspect: when you deliver the message of God, you need to show the people of God where you got it. Don't just take my word for it this is what it says. This is grounded in the text. It takes time to prove the point and if you don't do that, there is not a, 'Thus saith the LORD,' about your message. An element of authority missing." There are wonderful communicators out there building large gatherings that they call churches but that really aren't rooted in the word of God. So what do we know is happening there? Unseen in the spiritual realm, people are wandering away and departing from Christ. Those that love him are being damaged. And many think they know him and don't.

So the best thing we can do is tell people that we love, "You need to be in a Bible teaching church and if you're not, you need to go to one. If you think your pastor has a heart for it and is moving in the right direction, even though he's not there yet, if his heart is that way, stay there and cheer him on. Be the best church member you can be. Find the little bit of meat if there's a lot of bones, but there's a little bit of meat. But he's going in the right direction. He wants to be obedient to the word of God. Support him. Help grow him up." That's what people have to do with any minister of God. But when they are someone who is really not committed to the word of God, it's time to just go. Tell them why you're going and go.

I read a book recently by, you'll be seeing these books coming out soon. We want everybody in the church to have this book and we're going to give it out next week at the business meeting and it will be available, one per family, the book "Discipling," by Mark Dever. He makes really an application of this point that sometimes, when I first read it, I thought, "Wow, that's stepping over a line that I normally would not go to," but once I read it I thought, "I should have been going there already. I was wrong." He makes this point, he says when you think about discipling someone, and if this is, discipling is what we are all called to do to help other people follow Jesus. That's what discipling is. We are all following Jesus and discipling is helping someone else to follow Jesus; doing them some spiritual good to help them follow Jesus. So he says now, you can't disciple that many people. Maybe you can only disciple one so choose that person and think who in your life, who is open, who is teachable, who wants to be disciplined? But he makes this point, he says: listen, you might want to consider this, where does the person you're discipling go to church? And if they go to a church that doesn't teach the word of God, he says don't disciple them because you will probably be filling in for all the problems they would have that they would see more quickly at the church that they are at. You'll be helping them be content in a bad church where they need to get out of it and go somewhere where the word of God is taught because what they're doing is, you're helping

them some but they are getting it contradicted by everything that's being said from the pulpit and done in the ministry of the church. That's pretty amazing and as pastors we normally try to be sensitive about that. In general, you know, you don't want to be accused of sheep stealing, but some people need their sheep stolen. So it's not really stealing, it's reclaiming. They are the ones that have stolen them.

You know, there are books that we see, popular books. I just saw recently that terrible book "The Shack" is coming out as a movie. Now listen, you may have people, many people have read that book. It sold millions. I read it when it came out seven or eight years ago, nine years ago, because I knew what it was about and I knew I needed to read it to be aware and to be able to speak to people about it. Very popular and a lot of evangelicals embraced the book and said things like, "It gave me a whole new view of God." That ought to be a warning light. That's probably what people in Jeroboam's day said. You know, what it essentially is this guy thinking about the Trinity and musing about the Trinity and he devises a picture of the Trinity where, I'm not going to go into the details of it. He pictures the three persons of the Trinity in the oddest, weirdest way. But let me summarize it like this: William Paul Young offered to you a view of the Trinity, the most holy reality of all, which he devised in his own heart. That is the danger. There may be some okay things in it but you're going into the idol temple and you're not going to come out unstained. When I finished reading it, I read it because I'm a pastor, I wouldn't have read it otherwise, I felt like I needed to wash my brain out. So, the word of God is the only thing that does that. But listen, why do we need something else? God has given us his word to show us the glory of the Trinity. Is that not enough? It's more than enough.

The book "Jesus Calling" by another person named Young, Sarah Young, sold so many millions of copies. It's the same problem. I read this quote. I have looked at this book too. No, I didn't read the whole thing. But this quote should be enough to tell you right here the problem with it. Regardless of what people are saying about it, does it meet, does it pass the muster of Scripture? It does not. Listen what she said. This is in her introduction. The deception of this is she's apparently a Presbyterian and Reformed. She said this, "I began to wonder if I could receive messages during my communing with God. I had been writing in prayer journals for years but that was one way communication. I did all the talking. I knew God communicated with me through the Bible but I yearned for more. Increasingly I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day." She wanted to go somewhere other than Jerusalem. That's it. And though she may say some good things, her whole methodology is the sin of Jeroboam and if you follow that down and so the friends that we have that are doing that, we need to talk to them and say, "Listen, she's coming at it the whole wrong way." You know, rat poison is 92% corn meal. It's the 8% that gets you, gets the rat.

So what we need is the word of God. It comes down to that. We need to continually abide in the word of God and as the people of God, all we need is the word of God. And if you see us departing from the word of God, you need to call us on it and as Bereans we ought to do that for one another. We are to search the Scriptures daily to see, as they said, they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true. They looked at the

Old Testament to see, "Does what you say match up to this?" That's what we are to do and to hold each other to the word and to minister the word to each other. It's not just the preaching and teaching ministry. This is why the discipling ministry is so important too. It's us ministering the word of God to each other continually. But what do we have? Not the stuff from your own heart, not the stuff of your own ideas, not the stuff that really sounded clever in the book that you read. Is it the word of God? That's the only thing that's going to make a difference. Anything less is dangerous.

So we have to learn that and the beauty of it is that when we just put our trust in the word of God, when we just make the word of God all that we long for because we long for Jesus and Jesus is found in the word of God, he is not found through listening to something else. It's not found through some kind of weird meditation techniques. Jesus is seen in the Bible. As you study the Scriptures, that's where you see him. That's what he said to the people in his day, the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures to see salvation but the Scriptures they are that testify of me. The Scriptures are talking about me." So we need the word of God. We need the word of God and the word of God alone.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are to you that you are a God of grace and mercy, that you have made a way of salvation through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you have paid for our idolatry. We confess our hearts to be idol factories. We are no better than those that are walking away from you now and leading those astray in our hearts, Lord, if it were up to us, we know that we completely depend upon your grace and we desperately need your word. So make us people who are humble, broken, and yet faithful to depend upon your word and to love the Savior that is revealed in your word. Father, we pray that you would make us a people who are increasingly marked by godliness and righteousness, putting off wickedness that's still in our hearts and the things that you want to deal with are there because the word hasn't been applied. Lord, keep applying your word to our hearts in the preaching and teaching of the word but also, Lord, in the one-on-one ministry of the word believer to believer. Make us more and more holy. Make us more and more pure so that you will receive more and more glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.