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Elijah's New Assignment

1 Kings 19:15-21

Prayer: *Father God, I do again thank you that you are a great Lord, a most holy Lord, and Father, we thank you for the incredible privilege we have of knowing you as Lord. And Lord again, we're at the place in our corporate worship where we're going to open up your book and again we just -- we make the plea that your Holy Spirit would be here with us, that you would accompany us as we open up this book, that it would again be of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are back looking at the story of Elijah and when we last left Elijah, God had been showing him the difference between his presence, P-R-E-S-E-N-C-E, and his presents, P-R-E-S-E-N-T-S, that is his gifts, his miracles or the blessings that he could give. And Elijah had suffered a complete collapse, he had defeated all of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and wicked Queen Jezebel, instead of being convinced of the superiority of Elijah's God by this incredible victory that he had over her prophets, instead just doubles down and she threatens to take Elijah's life. So Elijah

flees for his life and he winds up deep in the wilderness and he has this confrontation with the living God. And so we pick up the story where God is about to give Elijah three spectacular miracles, each of them, however, without his presence. This is 1 Kings 19:11-21. It says: *Then he -- this is God -- said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."*

We saw last time that Elijah was still stuck on blame shifting and self-pity and playing fast and loose with the facts with his answer to God, but then God does something extraordinary. God doesn't lecture, he doesn't excoriate, he doesn't punish Elijah, he just reassigns him. This is verse 15 of 1 Kings -- 1 Kings 19, he says:

Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place." So God lives Elijah three separate anointings to attend to, two of kings and one of a prophet. And the kings to be anointed (Hazael and Jehu) were kings who were sent to punish wicked Israel's embrace of Baal. Their actual anointings were not even accomplished by Elijah but by his successor, the prophet Elisha. So this week we're going to look at the kings; next week we're going to look at the prophet.

One of these kings, Jehu, he was an insider, a fellow Israelite. The other, Hazael, well, he was an outsider, he was a Syrian, member of the enemy's camp. Both of these guys were not exactly upstanding citizens but that never stopped God from using them. Hazael's background, Hazael started out as the prime minister to Ben-hadad who was a Syrian king who had attacked Israel. And Ahab, you remember Ahab was the king of Israel at that time, he attacked Israel and Ahab with a vengeance. He mercilessly attacked Israel and he blasphemed Israel's God, but eventually he became sick. And he was sick and not only sick, but he was desperate, and in his desperation he sends his Prime Minister Hazael to inquire of the prophet Elisha whether or not this sickness is going to be fatal.

Well, that decision itself proved to be fatal, because based on what Hazael learned from the prophet, he decided to murder his king Ben-hadad. And it wasn't Elisha prophesy that was the cause or the effect of Ben-hadad's death, actually it was Hazael's own wickedness. *2 Kings 8:10-15* records this conversation that takes place when Hazael is there inquiring at this point about his king's health. This is what took place, it says: *And Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You shall certainly recover.' However the LORD has shown me that he will really die."* Well, you see, Elisha understood that it wasn't the disease that was going to kill Ben-hadad. Actually it was his prime minister. God gave Elisha a window into the future wickedness that Hazael was about to embrace, and it was a wickedness that even Hazael couldn't believe. It profoundly disturbed Elisha. We pick up again at *2 Kings 8*. It says this: *Then he -- this is Elisha -- set his countenance in a stare until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, "Why is my lord weeping?" He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child."* So Hazael said, *"But what is your servant -- a dog, that he should do this gross thing?"* And Elisha answered, *"The LORD has shown me that you will become king over Syria."* Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, (that would be

Ben-hadad) who said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he answered, "He told me you would surely recover." But it happened on the next day that he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and spread it over his face so that he died; and Hazael reigned in his place. So wicked Hazael becomes God's weapon of choice against God's own people, Israel. An outsider against Israel. Now Hazael is serving his own ruthless ambition but he was also freely doing exactly what God would have him do. God was using Hazael mightily to destroy the wickedness that had overtaken Israel. 2 Kings 10:32 says this, it says: In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel from the Jordan eastward: All the land of Gilead -- Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh -- from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, including Gilead and Bashan. Then in 2 Kings 13:3 it says: Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael, king of Syria.

Well, the point and principle is this. God is certainly not above anointing a pagan outsider to accomplish his will. Now, in this case, his will was the punishment of Israel. So God is willing to use outsiders and insiders as well to accomplish his will. Now Jehu was an insider. Jehu was a fellow Jew who attacked his apostate brethren with an absolute vengeance. Jehoram was the wicked king of Israel, Ahaziah the wicked king of Judah; Jehu

killed them both. 2 Kings 9:24 says: Now Jehu drew his bow with full strength and shot Jehoram between his arms; and the arrow came out at his heart, and he sank down in his chariot. 2 Kings 9:27 says: But when Ahaziah king of Judah saw this, he fled by the road to Beth Haggan. So Jehu pursued him, and said, "Shoot him also in the chariot." And they shot him at the Ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. Then he fled to Meggiddo, and died there. See, Jehu was also God's chosen instrument to exact vengeance on Ahab's sins. Remember who Ahab was, Ahab was this incredibly wicked king, husband of Jezebel, renowned for his wickedness. And after Ahab had stolen Naboth's vineyard by having him falsely accused and then executed, he had finally filled up the cup of God's wrath. And so he runs into his old nemesis Elijah as he's going to see this new piece of property he's acquired, he's at the scene of the crime, he runs into Elijah there and they have this confrontation again, and there Elijah pronounces a curse on him. This is 1 Kings 21:20, it says: So Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked me to anger, and made Israel sin.'

God is slow to anger and he's abounding in mercy but his mercy and his grace has limits. And with this one move, Ahab had exceeded the limit. And yet it still took years for God to execute his judgment. But Jehu had been chosen by God to execute that judgment. Jehu had every single one of Ahab's seventy sons beheaded. But he didn't stop there. *1 Kings 10:11* says: *So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining.* You might recall he had Jezebel thrown out a window, and he would have killed Ahab if he wasn't already dead. He was also determined to drive Baal worship back out of Israel. And so he pretended to organize this huge worship service that was going to be dedicated to Baal and he gathered all of the Baal worshipers throughout all of Israel and he assembled them in the temple and then he sends his soldiers into the temple with instructions to kill every last one. *2 Kings 10:28* says: *Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel.* And so actually it came to pass that the prophesy that was made originally to Elijah was carried out in the flesh actually by Elisha. Again that prophesy is *1 Kings 19:17*, it says: *It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.* I mean, we're looking at incredible violence. This violence is not for the faint of heart but it is part of God's judgment on Israel.

But I feel the need to repeat what I said before. You know, we live in a western democracy, the idea of summary executions, it just conjures up these ideas of Al Qaeda and ISIS, and many of the scriptures like these are trotted out to once again demonstrate that the Koran and the Bible are claimed to be morally equivalent. People say well, they both condone and they both advocate violence, and again I feel compelled to point out this one huge difference, and that is the Bible is the story of God's dealing with one nation to the rest of the world. And that one nation Israel received astounding blessings, you know, God fed and he clothed at least as far as sandals goes and protected the entire nation. But he also told them firsthand what the holiness of God was going to be. And as a result, God dealt with Israel severely. We see this. But he also dealt with Israel's enemies severely. See, God was the very first one to identify and punish anti-Semitism, and he did it because he knew something about us that we have seen repeated through history. There's a reason why anti-Semitism is simply a fact of life. It's because mankind is and always will be at war with God. And there's no nation or people group on the face of the earth that is more closely associated with God than Israel was. So Israel from the beginning has been the universal focus of man's unconscious hatred. Ever since the fall of Adam, every single human being comes into the world with a fallen nature unconsciously

shaking his fist at God. *Ephesians 2:3* says we were *by nature children of wrath, just as the others*. And that wrath is expressed even today by the fact that anti-Semitism is built into our spiritual genes. Mankind has hated Jews from the beginning because mankind unconsciously hates God. And when God himself took on flesh and walked the earth, that hatred found a flesh and blood expression against Jesus. Jesus wasn't speaking hyperbole when he responded to the disciples reporting about the push back that they got for presenting the gospel. He said in *John 15*: "*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*" So Jesus acknowledged that there's this unconscious gut level hatred and that is what drives every single person outside the kingdom of God, from sweet little old lady to the guy who wags his finger in your face. The problem is that this hatred is so deeply buried in our collective spirit that it's not so easily identifiable. I mean, the little old lady who just finds this gospel presentation annoying is operating from the very same well spring that ISIS foot soldiers are operating from and that is a hatred of God and a hatred of his gospel. If you say to yourself well, I don't know, I've never experienced that myself, well then you have to ask yourself how readily identifiable you are as a disciple of Christ. *2 Timothy 3:12* says: *All, all who desire to*

live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. And you know, this works both ways, I mean, the bottom line is this, if you say nothing, no one will ever bother you. If you say something, at some point someone's going to take offense. And to the extent that you refuse to stay silent will be the extent that, just like the disciples, you are going to get push back because mankind doesn't realize it but he hates, hates the gospel. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 6:22, he said: "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."

Men hate God. Women, too. And anti-Semitism is Christian persecution's first cousin because they both stem from an identification with God himself. And it's not just in the Middle East. I mean, what took place in Paris, France just illustrated the force that has always existed against the people God chose to reveal himself through. *Newsweek* magazine just said this. This is recently. It said this, it said: "France has suffered the worse violence, but anti-Semitism is spiking across Europe fueled by the war in Gaza. In Britain, the Community Security Trust says there were about 100 anti-Semitic incidents in July, double the usual number. The CST has issued a security alert for Jewish

institutions. In Berlin a crowd of anti-Israel protesters had to be prevented from attacking a synagogue. In Liege, Belgium, a cafe owner put up a sign saying dogs were welcome, but Jews were not allowed. Yet for many French and European Jews, the violence comes as no surprise. Seventy years after the Holocaust, from Amiens to Athens, the world's oldest hatred flourishes anew. For some, opposition to Israeli policies is now justification for open hatred of Jews."

See, there's a reason why God said to Elijah: *It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.* God had appointed these men to take extreme measures against those who would attack Israel from within or from without. Unquestionably there's violence in the Old Testament. There's violence in the Koran. But that doesn't make the Bible and the Koran equivalent. As I've said before, the difference between the Bible's vision and the Koran's is that the violence in the Bible is limited in its scope and purpose to disciplining, protecting, and assuring the survival of Israel. I mean, nowhere in the Bible is there a plan to take the world by force. And not so with Islam. Not so with the Koran. Jihad is just as much a part of the Koran as sanctification is as much a part of the Bible. And our problem is that there's two basic definitions of Jihad. There's the moderate Muslim definition

which is the spiritual struggle with oneself against sin, and then there's the radical definition which is a war or struggle against unbelievers. Now, Elijah's responding to a threat to the one nation that God himself had founded, the nation of Israel. Radical Islam sees every single person on the face of the earth as either Muslim or a threat to Islam. It sees every nation that is non Muslim as subject to conquest until it is brought into submission. It sees every moderate Muslim not committed to violent Jihad as non Muslim and an equal if not greater threat to Islam as well. You know, it's a religion of peace, so they say, but understand this peace they're speaking of. The peace of Islam is the peace of the conquered, no longer capable of resisting. And we know that this is not just theoretical. I mean, we are witness to this happening before our eyes. It's not just what happened in France. It's what happened to the Coptic Christians in Egypt, the wholesale slaughter of Christians in Syria and Nigeria, the virtual elimination of Christianity in Iran. There really is no pretense to peaceful coexistence in countries that have come under radical Islam. And yet history has proven over and over again that that is simply the way Islam advances.

I've often said this, you know, in deference to moderate Muslims, if we were ever overtaken by radical Muslims, the moderate Muslims would be the first ones to go. They would get the axe right away.

But my point is, there is no comparison between Islam and Christianity and between Israel's history and Islamic history. Because from the very start, God had set apart Israel as this unique nation whose government's head would be God himself. And he said to this nation that he led out of Egypt that he would protect them, defend them, dwell with them, and feed them, but they would also act as his arm bearing his justice only to the nations surrounding and threatening Israel. He also said that they alone would be subject to laws and commandments designed to impress upon them God's holiness. God said violate those laws and they, too, would be subject to severe and harsh punishment as well. Like I've said before, there's no other nation in which God said gather sticks on the Sabbath and you die. There's no other nation where God said curse out your parents and you're going to be executed. But God said that to Israel. You see, the good news and the bad news for Israel is that they would be singularly protected by God but that God would establish his holiness within them and sometimes at great cost to Israel. Israel was a special nation, a chosen nation with a theocratic rule unlike any other nation on the earth, and the difference between Islam and Christianity is that the Old Testament God is very narrowly focused in his laws, in his discipline, in his responses on Israel, his chosen people alone. God never intended for Israel to be some kind of conquering force that militarily forced itself on the rest of the world, but Islam

is quite comfortable with that role. So please don't ever fall for the line that says that Islam and Christianity are morally equivalent because they are not. They're not even close. And Elijah's command to anoint these brutal leaders was addressing the threat the false religion was to Israel and not part of some global Jihad. Now, you know, you seldom hear these parts of scripture spoken of because they are ancient history and because they are so blood thirsty. There's all kinds of violence in here and many preachers don't want to touch that stuff with a ten-foot pole. Far safer they feel to deal with a peaceful and gentle Jesus. But it was Jesus us himself who said in *Matthew 10:28*: *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* Jesus wasn't speaking about the devil here. What he was speaking about was his Father, and what he was saying is that there are things far more frightening than actual physical death.

So back to where we are with Jehu and Hazael. What is God's anointing of a brutal outsider like Hazael or a brutal insider like Jehu have to do with me? Well, our connection is *Romans 8:28*: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* You see, it's very easy to forget that little three-letter word that *Romans 8:28* hinges on. It's that word "all." See, our challenge, our

challenge is to believe, to truly believe God's word here, because God is making an incredibly audacious claim, and what he is saying is that every single event in the life of those who are called according to his purpose is designed for one specific purpose. God simply defines that as "good" but then in the very next verse he defines what he means by that "good." He says in *Romans 8:29*: *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* You see, it's critical to understand here exactly what God means by this. And what he is saying here is he's telling us that every single event in our life, if we are called of God, is designed to shape and mold us uniquely into the image of his Son. And the big question for us is do we really, really believe that? Because if we do, then we need to radically understand the divine connection between the events in our lives and God's purpose for those events. You see, just as God used Hazael and Jehu to discipline Israel, so too God will use anybody, insiders from within the church community or outsiders, non-believers that we run into every single day to shape and mold us into the image of his Son.

Have you ever had a person or an event or a situation break into your life that left you have mystified or befuddled or just plain angry? What is your first reaction? What is your first reaction to why this even happened? You see, if you're like most of us, you

will apply earthbound reason in an attempt to come up with an earthbound solution to who or what is afflicting you. And the idea that God would be using this very person or event specifically to shape and mold you into the image of his Son, it's not the first thing that we think of when we encounter difficult circumstances or people. But God insists in *2 Corinthians 3:18*, he says this: *We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* Now for some reason or other, many of us believe that that transformation can and should take place without pain. But they're mistaken. You see, you can't chip away the broken, fallen, sinful parts of us without each of us experiencing that as loss. But it's God who is the consummate artist. He's the one who alone can see the finished product and what he's looking at is a sanctified you. He has no intention of stopping the process until he gets there. See, God used an outsider like Hazael to punish and to shape and to mold Israel into the nation that he had called her to be. For Hazael's position it was good fortune or fate that enabled him to steal the throne from Ben-hadad. From God's perspective Hazael was simply a tool used by God for his purposes. Jehu was an insider, he was a fellow Jew, and God used him mightily to clean house from within, and whether he was an insider from Israel or an outsider from Syria, didn't really matter to God. He was still determined to cause all of

these things to work together for good, in this case the good of the nation of Israel; in our case, the good is conformity to the image of Christ. What that means for me is that God says that everything, everything that happens in my life has an end and a purpose. In Greek, the word is "telos." It means the end that something is pointed toward. You see, if you love Jesus Christ, then your life has a telos as well, and that telos is the image of Christ uniquely found and formed within you. And God chose you for this task of glorifying his Son before he even created the world. In *Ephesians 1:4*, it says: *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.* You see, the moment you really, really get that in the marrow of your bones will be the moment that your life in Christ is going to change, because as unique as you are on the face of this planet is the unique image that each of us bear of the Lord Jesus Christ. And God says that he is working in each of our lives to shape and mold and grow that unique expression of who his Son is as expressed by our lives.

Imagine, if you will, that your life -- think of it this way. Your life is so utterly charmed that God says nothing and nobody can come into your life without my expressly using it to shape and mold

you into the image of Christ. God says that doesn't just apply to Old Testament saints like Elijah. It also applies to New Testament saints like you and me. Now for Elijah, it was Jezebel. I mean, she caused Elijah's whole ministry to collapse. It was her threat to kill Elijah that sent him in a panic into the wilderness. But God used that time in the wilderness to teach Elijah the difference between his presence and his miracles. God taught him things in the wilderness that he never would have gotten any other way. So you might say that one of the best things that ever happened to Elijah was this confrontation with Jezebel. For Joseph it was 13 miserable years spent as a slave or a prisoner working out the messes that other people's sin had put him in. Joseph can point to his jealous brothers who sold him into slavery. He could point to Potiphar's cheating wife who falsely accused him of rape and had him put into jail. He could even point to the wine tester who he met in prison who promptly forgot him when he got out. You know, Joseph could have become so easily embittered by all the miserable people who came into his life, but he understood that each one had a point and a purpose, that God was using them to shape and mold Joseph so much so that he would say to his brothers in *Genesis 50:20*: "*But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*" You see, if you truly believe that God can take evil intended against you and turn it around into good for

you, well then you would achieve a liberty and a freedom for yourself that very few people on this planet can even hope to achieve.

I mean, do you have a person or a circumstance or a situation in your life that is dogging you? One that commands far more of your thoughts or attention than you wish that it would? One that makes you question God's goodness or his power or his care or even his concern for you? Well understand, God is behind that. And you may have heard many, many times before that while we can't change the situation ourselves that we find ourselves in, we can change the way that we respond to it. And that's basically very good advice. I mean, usually the only variable within a difficult situation is me. I can either wait for something to happen to the circumstance or the other person or I can adjust my reaction to it. And at least that puts the ball of change in my court. But what if in addition to knowing that, what if I also knew that no situation or circumstance for a child of God is ever a waste of time or energy because our sovereign God really, really, really promises us that not some things or most things but that *all things work together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose*. I mean, do you see if you truly, truly bought that how much grace, strength, and power would be yours?

Let me read to you a quote from a man who had a similar difficult circumstance. Let me just read you his quote first. This is what he says about the sovereign action of God in our lives. It's a long quote, so I have to pay attention here. It says this, it says: "Take any occurrence that happens, great or small. The fall of an empire or the fall of a sparrow, which our Lord himself tells us never once happens 'without our father.' God is assuredly aware of everything that happens in his universe. There are no dark corners in it, into which His all seeing eye cannot pierce; there is nothing that occurs in it, which is hidden from his universal glance. But certainly neither can it be imagined that anything which occurs in his universe takes him by surprise. Nor yet can He be imagined to be indifferent to its happening, as if, though he sees it coming, he does not care whether it happens or not. That is not the kind of God our God is; he is a God who infinitely cares, cares even about the smallest things. Did not our Savior speak of the sparrows and the very hairs of our head to teach us this? Well then, can it be imagined that, though infinitely caring, God stands impotently over against the happenings in his universe, and cannot prevent them? Is he supposed to be watching from all eternity things which he does not wish to happen, coming, coming, coming, ever coming until at last they come. And he is unable to stop them? Why, if he could not prevent their happening any other way, he need not to have made the universe; or he might

have made it differently. There was nothing to require him to make this universe or any other universe, except for his own good pleasure; and there is nothing to compel him to allow anything which he does not wish to happen to occur in the universe which he has made for his own good pleasure. Clearly things cannot occur in God's universe, the occurrence of which is displeasing to him. He does not stand helplessly by, while they occur against his wish. Whatever occurs has been foreseen by him from all eternity, and it succeeds in occurring only because its occurrence meets his wish. We know that it could not occur unless it had a function to perform, such a place to fill, and a part to play in God's comprehensive plan. And knowing that, we are satisfied."

Now the man who wrote that was the great Bible teacher BB Warfield. You may not have heard this but when he was 25 years old, he married his sweetheart and while they were on their European honeymoon, during an intense thunderstorm, his newly wed wife was struck by lightning and permanently paralyzed for the rest of her life. They never traveled, they never did any of the things that normal people do. Steve Farrar is the author who quoted Warfield in his book *God Built*. He also said this about him, he said: "For close to 40 years, he taught his class, wrote his articles, and took care of his wife. He was able to arrange his schedule so that he was rarely absent from her side for more than two hours at a

time. As a result of the paralysis they were never able to have children or enjoy the life they thought they would have together." Think this guy's got the right to say what he said? I think so. You want to talk about an opportunity for bitterness? You know, we all know that stuff happens, but if every one of us really believed like BB Warfield believed, that nothing happens by accident, then our lives would be changed. If we believe that every single person, place, or thing that comes into my life for good or bad comes into my life having first passed by the throne room of God's sovereignty and furthermore that God promises that all things work together for good. But here's the catch. God insists on defining that good. And he says that good, that ultimate good is conformity to the image of his Son.

You know, Hazael and Jehu no idea that they were God's chosen instruments for the shaping and molding of the nation of Israel. So too those God has chosen to shape and mold your life. I mean, Jehu as a fellow Israelite might have known that God was using him but even so, even Jehu's kingdom did not end well. Hazael certainly couldn't care less. I mean after all, he was the king of Israel's bitter enemy Syria. But he was still God's chosen instrument, and he was just doing what God's providence would have him do, not for his sake but for the sake of Israel, and whether he cared or not made no difference. And so some of the people that

come into our lives are like Jehu. These are people from within the Christian community who knowingly or unknowingly God has sent into our lives to change and shape and mold us into the image of his Son. And their affect on our life may not be as murderous as Jehu's but many times it's almost as painful and disruptive. But it's incredibly important to see them in all their difficulty as God sent, either for their sake or for yours. Because really believing that all things work together for good will radically change your outlook on literally all things. You know, but most of the people that come into our lives are really like Hazael. They neither know nor care whether God is using their situation to grow me as a Christian. But God knows. And the more I know about what God is doing, the more equipped I am to understand what it is I'm going through.

So do you have a Jehu or a Hazael in your life? Jehu, like I said, may be somebody within the church community, somebody that you're struggling with. Hazael is the consummate outsider, someone who is in the world and of the world and is determined to make your life miserable. Let me suggest God's plan of action for you if you have someone in your life who's making your life miserable. I know how counterintuitive this is, I know how difficult this is to even hear, but what you need to do is take the time, take the effort to pray for them, not for their sakes but for yours. I've given this

advice out many, many times, and I tell people this all the time, I said, you may have to pray for this person fifty to a hundred times a day because that's how many times they're going to come into your conscience. That's how many times the enemy's going to use them to just ruin your day, twist you around, fill your stomach with knots, and every single time that person comes into your life, you need to pray for them. You have what I consider to be a designated enemy. And Jesus gave us specific instructions for dealing with designated enemies in *Matthew 5:44*. This is what he said: *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."* See, the question is not whether there's a possibility that these designated enemies may be God sent; that is a fact. They are God sent. God has sent this person into your life to shape and mold and discipline you into the image of his Son. Now I've had persons like that in my life, I've had both Jehus and Hazael's and it took me a while to realize they were all God sent. And you know, I took my medicine, I prayed for these people and I've said it many, many times often times praying through gritted teeth. And I can say it by experience that God has used them mightily to break off sinful pieces of me and shape me into the image of his Son. I can also say that process is still ongoing and that it's almost never instantaneous. I mean, like I said, I've prayed for persons for months and months and months before God finally did a work in

my life and enabled me to see it and sometimes you're going to never know at all this side of heaven. But you know, being clueless doesn't have to stop us. If you don't have a clue as to how God could possibly use your situation, God's got that covered as well. He simply tells us to ask him for wisdom. He says, in *James 1:5-6*: *If any of you have lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.* See, we really need to grapple with and understand and buy and own the fact that God is going to use any and all persons, places, and things, or circumstances to shape and mold us into the image of his Son. Just consider what God accomplished with Hazael and Jehu. I mean, they shaped and molded and disciplined Israel in spite of what they thought they were doing. God isn't nearly finished with every one of us.

Joni Eareckson Tada knows exactly what difficult circumstances are all about. Most of you know this, at age 17 she broke her neck in a diving accident and for decades now she's been a quadriplegic. In addition to that, she suffered through breast cancer and now is in chronic pain. So she is more qualified than most to comment on difficult circumstances, and I want to conclude this morning with her thoughts. She says this: "Why won't God remove this problem? Why won't he change my situation? Why won't he heal me? Well, God

may heal you -- honestly, he may, he might do that. He might remove your suffering but if not, he will use it to remove anything and everything that stands in the way of fellowship with you if indeed you are serious about the Lordship of Christ in your life. So let God have his way, let him mold you and make you and transform you from glory to glory. That is the deeper healing and you do not have to break your neck to receive it." Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for your word, I thank you for Jehu and Hazael, although I'm sure those in Israel would never even think of that. But Lord, I thank you for the Jehus and Hazaels who are in our lives. I pray that you would give us the wisdom to understand and to put into practice the idea that every single thing, every single event, every single person and place in our life is there for a purpose, a telos, and that is to shape and mold us into the image of your Son. Give us the sure, set knowledge of that, give us the ability to act on it, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.