

Sermon 35, The Folly and the Folly,⁵ 1 Kings 22:41-53

Proposition: God does not want His people to foolishly cooperate with the wicked, nor will He take lightly the provocations with which the wicked foolishly provoke Him!

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Introduction

Dearly beloved, we come tonight to the final words of 1 Kings. Now, as far as we know the author did not intend to "end" his book here. "First Kings" is not a separate book from "Second Kings;" rather, they are one work published in two volumes. This is just where the first scroll ended, presumably. (Don't ask me why books like Psalms and Isaiah aren't split into multiple volumes; I truly don't know.) Thus, Lord-willing next week we will continue right on into 2 Kings without a break.

Nonetheless, though this is largely formulaic material, and though it is not a genuine ending, it is still a through-provoking place to break the book into two parts. Why? Because the author takes a few verses out of his focus on the house of Omri in order to tell us about the way that house of Omri had begun to corrupt Judah, too. Jehoshaphat, an otherwise good king, was lured into evil by his friendship with the house of Ahab. In effect, tonight's passage, which discusses the careers of both Ahaziah and Jehoshaphat, reminds us more than anything of how

⁵ Once again, I am indebted to Dale Ralph Davis (*in loc.*) for this title, as well as for the basic structure of my outline.

holy God is and how deeply He hates sin. God hates sin! He hates it in the wicked — look at Ahaziah, who gave himself to unbridled sin. But He also hates it in the righteous — look at Jehoshaphat, who generally speaking followed God closely. What we will see tonight, then, is that God does not want His people to foolishly cooperate with the wicked, nor will He take lightly the provocations of the wicked!

I. The Folly of the Righteous: Compromise, vv. 41-50

We see first the folly of the righteous in cooperating with the wicked in this summary of Jehoshaphat's reign. Now, this isn't all that Kings has to say about Jehoshaphat. He already appeared earlier in this chapter, and he appears again in 2 Kings 3. This is, though, the only pericope he gets to himself, and even here the only real "narrative" section turns on his affiliation with Ahaziah in the shipbuilding business. Meanwhile, 1 Kings 22 and 2 Kings 3 focus on what Jehoshaphat did while cooperating with Ahab and with Ahab's son Jehoram. Clearly the author of Kings is far more interested in the affairs of Israel than of Judah. Yet he does tell us about what was happening in Judah, here and there. This is one of those places.

A. Jehoshaphat's Basic Info, vv. 41-42, 45, 50

So what do we see about Jehoshaphat? He had a long, stable reign — 25 years in Jerusalem. His father Asa had reigned 41 years. Compare that to Omri's 12-year reign and Ahab's 21-year reign. Clearly, the favor of God is on Judah, bringing far greater stability and peace than prevailed in Israel.

Jehoshaphat was mighty in war. In fact, the other two stories about him in Kings feature his military prowess. But those things are not of great importance for revealing to us the character of God. The author simply mentions them and moves on.

B. Jehoshaphat's Godliness, vv. 43, 46

What is important about Jehoshaphat now, almost 3000 years after his death? That he walked with God. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. Asa was a man who followed God, and his son Jehoshaphat did the same thing. Wouldn't that be wonderful if the same could be said about every one of us here at Harvest — that you and I obeyed God and did what was right in His eyes?

Jehoshaphat even banished the rest of the male cult prostitutes. His father had done the same thing decades before, and yet here they were, back in town. Jehoshaphat wanted nothing to do with such perversion. He didn't kill these men; he simply told them that they were not allowed to live in Judah.

What do we make of this? Clearly it is recorded to Jehoshaphat's credit. He believed that the presence of homosexual activity, particularly homosexual activity linked to the explicit worship of false gods, was dangerous to his society. He did not hold it against the practitioners, or condemn them to death. No — banishment is a way of saying "You're not wanted here, but you're welcome to pursue your own life and choose your own lifestyle elsewhere."

This distinction should be familiar to all parents, or to all who were once children: "You can't do that vs. You can't do that *in here*." Jehoshaphat was asserting the latter. You might

worship idols, and you might indulge in some kind of homosexual behavior. But you can't do it in here, in my kingdom. The fact that he said this is a sign of his commitment to following God.

Why did Jehoshaphat say this? He said it because the key mark of godliness in his day (as in ours) was who and how you worship. These men weren't just indulging in homosexual activity. They were doing it as cult prostitutes — that is, as people hired by/enslaved by pagan temples to sexually service worshippers. Jehoshaphat was committed to correct worship of the one true God in Judah, and so he forbade pagan shrines and worship practices within Judah's borders.

The national application for us is tricky. Should the civil government mandate that only true worship take place? Our confession of faith says no. It is the duty of government to protect its people, but not to ensure that they worship God rightly. This is a difference between the USA and the ancient kingdom of Judah.

So what should we understand instead from this verse about Jehoshaphat's actions? Our personal and familial responsibility to promote and protect true worship. Jehoshaphat was a man who walked with God, and that meant that in his domain, where he was responsible, he said, "No, you may not have that false worship. You can do it elsewhere; you can leave my jurisdiction and practice your perversions in Syria or Egypt. But you may not worship a false god under my roof."

Do you lead your family this way? Do you seek to ensure that you worship God rightly, in the way to which He has called you? Do you do your best to help your family worship God rightly? And is clear that false gods are not allowed or propitiated in your household?

Fellow elders, we need to ask ourselves this question about the church. We have a responsibility to Jesus Christ to govern and conduct the worship rightly here at Harvest. Are we faithfully executing that responsibility? By God's grace, I think we have the externals right. I think we read, pray, sing, and administer the sacraments according to Christ's commands. But there is always room for improvement, particularly in the heart. How focused are we during worship? How eagerly and faithfully do we prepare for worship? How faithfully do we seek to remember and implement what we heard?

Jehoshaphat led his people in godliness. He insisted that false worship would not take place under his watch.

C. Jehoshaphat's Major Compromise, v. 44

But sadly, Jehoshaphat did not carry this principle of godliness to its logical conclusion. Though he would not allow false worship in his own territory, he was apparently quite happy to cooperate closely with those who served idols. Verse 44 says it all: He made peace with the king of Israel — with Ahab and his sons. Indeed, he not only made peace with them, but he married his son to Ahab's daughter Athaliah. He wasn't around to see it, but as Dale Ralph Davis put it, redemptive history almost ended in 841 B.C. when Athaliah succeeded in eliminating the entire line of David, all except one little boy.

Peace is the union of the appetite's inclinations, and peace with others means wanting what they want. When we read that Jehoshaphat made peace with Israel, we need to understand that he didn't just cease active warfare against the Northern Kingdom; he decided to pursue the same goals by working closely with the Omride rulers. He made his people like Ahab's people and his horses like Ahab's horses, as he so eloquently put it earlier in the chapter. Brothers and sisters, that is what we call "compromise." To be kind to the wicked, to reach out to the wicked, to host the wicked — that's all acceptable and even mandatory. But to make a full and conclusive peace with idol-worshippers, to say "You and I really want the same thing; our desires head in the same direction" — that is not acceptable. Chronicles tells us that Jehoshaphat was excoriated by multiple prophets for his insistence on being all chummy with the house of Ahab. He not only refused to fight against Ahab, which was laudable and even noble; he insisted on fighting for Ahab, on making his goals identical with Ahab's. And that's where compromise came back to bite his family. Hard. We'll talk about that more in a few weeks when we get to 2 Kings 11.

D. Jehoshaphat's Folly Judged, vv. 47-49

But even during his own lifetime, this cooperation with the wicked didn't pay off for Jehoshaphat. We saw last week how he almost met his death at the hands of the Syrians in a war that wasn't his. Here the narrator highlights a different episode: shipwreck. Like his great-grandfather Solomon, Jehoshaphat commissioned a merchant fleet to be built in the southern tip of Israel, its port on the Gulf of Aqaba called Ezion-geber. This was possible because thanks to the mercy of God, Judah dominated its neighbor Edom (v. 47). This fleet was built in cooperation with Ahaziah, Chronicles tells us. But God frustrated this project; the ships were wrecked in dry dock. Ahaziah was game to rebuild them and try again, but Jehoshaphat said "No." He had learned, or begun to learn, that aligning oneself too closely with the wicked doesn't pay. Rather than go along with Ahaziah's corrupt agenda, Jehoshaphat took the loss and moved on. Economically, this was a wise decision. Don't keep spending money on what's already cost you too much! But spiritually, it is was a wiser decision. No matter how far you've gone in cooperation with the wicked, back out if you can. Otherwise, beware: God will judge you.

II. The Folly of the Wicked: Rebellion, vv. 51-53

So that was Jehoshaphat's folly: to make peace with the wicked and enthusiastically enter into their plans, designs, and goals. But Ahaziah's folly was even worse.

A. Ahaziah's Short Reign, v. 51

Remember, we have heard that God will cut off Ahab's dynasty, and sure enough — we see that Ahaziah reigns a mere two years. The same word from God that cut off Ahab's life is working to cut off his dynasty.

B. Ahaziah's Triple Tradition of Treachery, v. 52

But more than that, Ahaziah shows absolutely no disposition to repent. He follows a triple tradition of treachery, sinning against God like Ahab, Jezebel, and Jeroboam. All three of these

are terrible examples to follow. Yet there's no question that their ways were handed down to Ahaziah by tradition. That was what he knew, and that's what he practiced.

Are you in this boat? Did your father and your mother teach you false worship, falsehoods about reality and human life? Did they point you to a political or religious leader of the past who led an entire nation astray? Even if they did all this and more, even if you are the child of Ahab and Jezebel, you don't have walk in their footsteps. Jesus Christ is willing to receive you. He has saved sinners worse than Ahaziah, and He can save you. We'll see next week how God came to Ahaziah and confronted him with the truth that he was welcome to call upon God and hear a powerful and living word from the LORD.

C. Ahaziah's Provocation of God, v. 53

But as it is, Ahaziah pursued the way of folly. In particular, he worshipped Baal, the "me-god" of the Ancient Near East. This provoked the LORD; it made Yahweh angry. And as we'll see next week, God punished Ahaziah for it.

III. Application

So what do we make of this? Where is Jesus Christ in this text? Where is the gospel of God's grace in His Son? It's here: in our text's insistence that God hates sin, whether it's found in the righteous or in the wicked. God has no respect for sin, no understanding attitude toward sin, no sympathy for sin. God hates sin. He hates it so much because it killed His only Son. In fact, the true measure of how bad sin is and how much God hates it can only be taken at Golgotha.

Here, in 1 Kings 22, we see a glimpse of what God thinks of sin. God wrecked Jehoshaphat's ships because Jehoshaphat was planning to use them to profit from an evil relationship. God was provoked against Ahaziah because Ahaziah worshipped and served Baal, to his own destruction. And do you know what? God is so enraged about *your* sin, He takes it so seriously, that He punished His own Son in your place. That's how much God hates sin — and how much He loves sinners. So when you read this passage and consider what it says, remember this: that God is holy, and thus a hater of all moral impurity. That fact is one of the bedrock realities of the gospel proclamation that Jesus Christ died for sinners.

A. Honor Christ the Lord as Holy

So the first application from this whole passage is to honor Christ the Lord as holy. When you think of Jesus, think of Him as a hater of sin. Think of sin as the killer of the best man who ever lived. That's what sin is. But Christ is holy. He is separate from sinners. He is morally pure to the nth degree. Absolutely no shadow of failure to love God and neighbor has stained or ever can stain Him.

How do you honor Christ as holy? Based on our passage tonight, we see four major facets to this.

B. Recognize God's Wrath Against Sin

In terms of your understanding, your mindset, you should treat sin as a horrible thing that rightly provokes God's wrath. If you understand how much God hates sin, then you won't want to flirt with sin. You won't want to get up close to sin. You won't want to think about sin with relish,

even though of course you don't actually intend to *do* it! Focus on the truth about God that this passage tells us, namely, that God hates sin! Only when you see God's wrath on sin, as manifested at Calvary, will you come to really and truly stand against sin. Only when you love Jesus and see what sin did to Jesus will sin begin to seem to you far worse than shipwreck and far worse than breaking with your parents' evil ways.

C. Don't Provoke God

Another way to honor God is not to provoke Him by persistence in evil. If you sin, repent! Talk to Him and ask His forgiveness. Talk to the people you sinned against, admit your wrongdoing, and ask their forgiveness. What provokes God is not merely sin, but especially persistence in sin. The only way to overcome sin is by repenting and asking God for forgiveness and help. Take that way, and He will help you. He promises.

D. Don't Compromise with Evil

You can and should honor Christ as holy by refusing to compromise with evil and evil persons. We talked about this as Jehoshaphat's sin. But what does it look like in our daily lives today? None of us have the opportunity to cooperate at the highest levels with foreign ungodly governments, or even to bring about ecclesiastical fellowship between our church and apostate bodies that resemble Northern Israel in their worship practices and formal commitments. So does the warning about compromise only apply to high-level diplomats and church leaders?

Obviously, I think not. This passage was written for all of us, not just for kings and archbishops. So that means we need to bring it down to the level where we all live. What does ungodly compromise with the wicked look like in our own day, in our everyday lives?

Well, remember that the root of Jehoshaphat's sin here was to align his hopes, dreams, and goals with those of the wicked. If Ahab wanted to go to war with Syria, then Jehoshaphat wanted to go to war with Syria. If Jehoram wanted to go to war with Moab, then Jehoshaphat wanted to go to war with Moab.

What's the obvious parallel in our own lives? Adopting the goals, hopes, and dreams of the ungodly as our own! Are you sympathetic toward your favorite TV characters? Beware: you can begin to want what they want, love what they love, follow what they follow — and before you know it, you, like Jehoshaphat, have made peace with the ungodly and assimilated your desires to theirs! Or what about your favorite publications, news outlets, recreational activities, films? They are written, produced, and directed most of the time by those with no heart for God, no desire to obey His word, and an agenda of their own. How deeply in sympathy are you with your favorite sports players, authors, pundits, musicians, or movie stars?

Is your deepest dream prosperity, comfort, and convenience? Those are the gods of our culture. Four percent annual economic growth is our cultural nirvana. We can collectively imagine no greater Heaven than that. Is that a lie you've bought?

Christian, I must warn you: to live for wealth, to live for fame, to live for popularity, to live for good restaurants and gourmet food and designer clothing, is to commit the same folly that Jehoshaphat committed. He was happy to align himself and his dreams with the wicked.

This applies to romantic relationships too. Who are you letting yourself date, or think about marrying? A believer who will stimulate you to love God and seek peace with Him? Or an unbeliever who is friends with the world and will want to make you friends with the world too? Who are your best friends and favorite fictional characters, whether in books or in movies or on TV? The point is that close relationships can easily lead you to value most what your friends and associates value most. It's not wrong to be friends with unbelievers; Jesus called Judas "friend." But it is wrong to align your life, your motives, and your goals with theirs — to be "at peace" with them in the deepest sense of the term.

Compromise with evil is what sent Jesus to the cross. Adam aligning himself with the values, goals, and desires of the Serpent is ultimately the reason Jesus had to come and die. If you love Christ, and want to honor Him as holy, then remember His passion; remember His saving work — and stop aligning yourself with the world. Be much with Christ, and learn to love what He loves!

E. Do Engage in Proper Worship!

How do you do that? Through worship! Jehoshaphat promoted and protected true worship in his kingdom. Ahaziah did the opposite. The results are obvious. If you want to align your values and goals with those of Jesus Christ, then you need to be with Him, listen to Him, walk with Him. How do you do that? Supremely, by gathering with His people to hear His word, sing His praise, and partake of His sacraments. What we are doing right now is the climax of communion with God. You can and should commune with God in private worship and in family worship, too. Read His word in your family, talk about it, pray together, and then sing His praise. Read it by yourself, think about it, and pray about it. In all three cases, implement what you hear in your daily life through prayer and effort. That is proper worship! That is what Jehoshaphat, in his best moments, sought, and that is what preserved him from total apostasy.

Brothers and sisters, see from these verses how much God hates sin, and how foolish it is to give yourself to sin or even to compromise with sin. Remember that Jesus Christ died for sin. And know that if you reject His work and choose to continue on in your sin, doing exactly as you please, that you will suffer the fate of Ahaziah. Don't choose the way of folly or the other way of folly. Choose the way of life, opened up by Christ's death and vindicated by His resurrection. Jehoshaphat did, and despite his failures, God accepted him. His mercy is for you too. You see, brothers and sisters, we're all compromised! We all have residual friendship for the world. But Christ died for that too. Trust Him. Rely on Him. Honor Him as holy — and don't ever forget how much He hates sin. Amen.