

“Jehoahaz & Jehoash: The Pete & Repeat Kings”

Who’s the Boss? – A series on the Kings

2 Kings 13

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Kings 13, 2 Kings chapter 13.

I am sure you are familiar with the good old Pete and Repeat jokes aren’t you? Jokes like “Pete and Repeat were in a boat and Pete fell out. Who was left?” Of course, you can imagine where this goes – the person answers, “Repeat.” And with a smile on your face you say, “Pete and Repeat were in a boat and Pete fell out who was left?”

Our text this morning has this déjà vu all over again kind of spirit. First there is Jehoahaz. He is the son of Jehu, the king appointed by God and anointed by one of the sons of the prophets to be God’s king of justice against the house of Ahab. Jehoahaz did what was evil in the sight of the Lord in that he continued on in the sins of Jeroboam. You remember Jeroboam don’t you? He was the first king of these 10 Northern Tribes referred to in the text as Israel. He established a golden calf worship in place of the true worship of Yahweh because he didn’t want his people being drawn back to Jerusalem and the Temple. This vile act earned Jeroboam the right to be the king by which all other king’s wickedness is judged. And Jehoahaz is no different than the many who have preceded him. He continues the calf worship and does not turn from this wicked form of idolatry. And so God sends his pre-ordained and pre-planned judgment through the sword of Hazael of Syria. But then Jehoahaz seeks the Lord and the Lord listens to this calf worshiper and relieves the sword through the sending of a savior.

And then, as if we hit the repeat button on our Ipod, here we go again with Jehoash, Jehoahaz’s son. He too does what is evil in the sight of the Lord and does not turn from the wicked calf worship that Jeroboam started. But again we see him seek the Lord through a strange interaction with Elisha and again the Lord intervenes and relieves the nation of Israel by turning to them and helping them once again. It is a Pete and Repeat kind of story! So, why is it here in the text? What are we to learn from looking at the continual wickedness of God’s people and the continual steadfast love of Yahweh God? Before we answer those questions, let’s read the account of these Pete and Repeat kind of kings. *Read 2 Kings 13.*

I. The Sender of the Sword is the Sender of the Savior

- a. This Pete and Repeat account has a very specific intent, and so we must ask, what are we to learn from looking at the continual wickedness of God’s people and the continual steadfast love of Yahweh God? Consider with me that the sender of the sword is also the sender of the Savior. The same God who raised up and sent the Syrian king, Hazael, against Israel, is the same God who in this text hears the pleas for mercy two different times and sends a Savior for His people. God sends both the sword and the savior. As we consider this thought let’s examine for a minute the sending of the sword and the sending of the savior.
- b. *The Sword is Compelled by Continual Sin – vs. 1-3*
 - i. Notice first of all that the sword is compelled by the continual sin of God’s people. So, verse 2 tells us that Jehoahaz did not turn from the sins of idolatry, or in other words, he

did not change course from but continued in the same ruts as Jeroboam and all the other wicked kings. It is because of this continual sin that God then in verse 3 is kindled in his wrath against them. We have talked about this before in our study of the kings, but notice again the steadfast love of the Lord and the slowness to wrath. His sword is compelled by continual sin. Notice along with this that the anger of the Lord is not an idle emotion that just blows a gasket or yells and screams, but rather the Lord's anger is not easily aroused and it is slow in coming, but when it comes it is an anger that acts to solve a problem. God's people are not living according to God's ways, and this is a problem. Worse yet, God's king is not abandoning the idolatry of the land but is leading the people to continue in denying the singularity of Yahweh God, and this is a problem. Therefore, the anger of the Lord is kindled and his anger produces action that is meant to solve the problem. The continual sin of the people compels the sword.

c. *The Sword is Providentially Prepared – vs. 3*

- i. But also notice that this sword has been providentially prepared. What I mean by that is that God was at work long before Jehoahaz took the throne to establish Hazael as his sword of judgment against Israel. We read about that way back in 1 Kings 19 where God told Elijah that there would be three men anointed as agents of justice among his people who were persisting in idolatry. Many years before Jehoahaz even had the opportunity to either be faithful or frivolous God had a plan in the works to have the sword of judgment and justice ready. You see God is no reactionary who gets caught off guard by the sins of his people. Rather, he knows exactly what is coming and he is prepared to respond.
- ii. Isn't it also interesting to know that the house of Jehu that was appointed as a means of judgment against the house of Ahab is now under that same judgment because of the same sin of idolatry? The tables have turned on Jehu's own son because Jehu was not faithful to the Lord and neither was His son. Therefore the very sword of justice and judgment that they held against the likes of Ahab's family was now being wielded by a Syrian king against them. The sword of justice is providentially prepared and sent.

d. *The Sword is Devastatingly Effective – vs. 7*

- i. And this sword has devastating effect. Verse 7 makes it clear that Hazael had wielded the sword of justice well against the nation of Israel. By the time he is done with them the nation is at its lowest point. The army had less than fifty horsemen, and only ten chariots, and only 10,000 foot soldiers. The army had been obliterated by the very effective attacks of Hazael of Syria. God had picked the right man to bring the sword of justice against his idolatrous people. And it is at this point in the narrative that we see these idolatrous kings seek out the Lord. So, in verse 4 Jehoahaz turns to the Lord for help, and in verses 14-19 we have Jehoash turning to the Lord for help. The sword of justice that the Lord sent was devastatingly effective for it produced in the kings a seeking after the Lord's help. What this tells us is that even evil kings need God's protection.
 1. As we read through the accounts of their turning to the Lord wasn't there something that just didn't quite sit right? Doesn't it seem like they both display a seeking after the Lord that smells of a disingenuous spirit? They seem to be mainly interested in gaining God's salvation, not his transformation. Their desperation produced hearts longing for rescue, not redemption. They didn't want to be returned to the Lord, they simply wanted the Lord's favor to return to

them. So, the text says of Jehoahaz that he sought the favor of the Lord. He didn't want to be restored to the Lord, he simply wanted the favor of the Lord returned to him because of how bad things were for him at the time.

2. Then we have this very strange account of the interchange between Jehoash and Elisha. Just to put in perspective, we haven't heard about Elisha in the text since chapter 9 which is the equivalent of at least 28 years in the course of events that the narrative is covering. Now, Jehoash hears that Elisha is dying and he rushes to his side and says, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" Now this is the same phrase that Elisha spoke when Elijah was carted off to heaven by horses and a chariot of fire. What this phrase seems to indicate is that Jehoash understood that there was protection over the land because of the presence of Elisha. He was their defender, and it would only take a minute to remember all the times that Elisha brought great military victory to the nation through being an agent of God's miraculous intervention. Jehoash knew this and he knew that the nation was losing something when Elisha died. So, again, there is a great deal of disingenuous spirit in Jehoash's actions here, but also there is the right sense in which he understands what is at stake when Elisha dies. So, disingenuous or not, both Jehoahaz and Jehoash understand that they need the protection of Yahweh God. And so they turn to him for help.
3. Now, that is staggering enough in itself that these two calf worshiping kings would even think to seek out help from Yahweh God. But what is even more staggering is that Yahweh God listens to them. So, the Lord who sent the sword against them because of their idolatry is now the Lord who sends the savior because the Lord hears their pleas for help.

e. *The Savior is Sent Because the Lord Hears – vs. 4*

- i. Yahweh's response to those who seek Him is to listen. In other words, His ear is attune to hear this kind of plea. Jehoahaz is at the end of his rope. He must obviously know that the golden calves that are in Bethel and Dan aren't going to be able to do anything for him. He must realize that the Asherah pole is of no help here, and so he decides to seek the Lord. In Psalm 106 the psalmist gives a general overview of the history of Israel as a way to show forth the glory of God and in verses 44-46 he speaks of God hearing the nations pleas for mercy and intervening in their judgment:
 1. ⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry. ⁴⁵ For their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁴⁶ He caused them to be pitied by all those who held them captive. (Ps. 106:44-46 ESV)
- ii. This is how the Lord works. When he hears the cry of those in distress he looks upon their distress. Now, in this immediate context back in 2 Kings we are told why. In verse 4 it says that he listened to Jehoahaz because he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them. These same noun and verb combination is used in Exodus 3 when God confronts Moses at the burning bush in the wilderness and commissions him to go and be the people's savior because he has seen their distress and heard their pleas for mercy. And so, here in our text, the Lord heard Jehoahaz simply because he sought him. I am not even convinced that he sought him with pure motive or true humility, and yet God listens because the distress of his people was great.

- iii. Do we not see in this that my sin can never create so great a gap that the mercy and grace of God cannot span. No matter our sin condition, or what we have done to provoke the righteous wrath of God, His ear is attune to those who seek Him. My sin does not create too great a gap for God's mercy to cross. God's pity, compassion, and grace are truly greater than my sin! In fact, it is often the case that the Lord uses oppression and difficulty to bring people to Himself for help. Often it is not until people are at the end of their own resources that they finally look to the Lord and call out to his name for help.
- iv. Maybe that is you this morning. Maybe you have known that you need to humble yourself before the Lord and look to Him for his mercy and grace to abound in your life, and yet up until now you have resisted. Maybe God has brought or allowed some serious oppression in your life and you are at the end of your rope. May I call you to pursue this listening God? His pattern is to have an open ear to people in situations like yours. Especially if you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ. You know about him and maybe you believe that he lived and died and rose again, but you just have never put your heart's trust in this finished work of Christ alone to save you from your sins. Maybe you have thought that your sins are too great and the gap is too wide between you and God. But look at this life of Jehoahaz! If there was ever a gap too wide it would have been here, but God still heard and God sent his merciful reprieve. God will hear and God will answer. Call on Him today! He has sent a Savior already and he is ready to forgive your sins and blot out your transgressions and adopt you into His family.
- v. So, to summarize this first point, we must note that the Lord who sends the sword is also the Lord who sends the savior.

II. The Sword and the Savior Do Not Produce Repentance

- a. But then we must notice that the sword and the savior do not repentance. Look at verse 6. Can you believe that? After God mercifully intervenes and sends a savior and allows for some physical reprieve from their oppression they continue on in their calf and Asherah worship! Great mercy does not guarantee repentant hearts.
- b. In Dale Ralph Davis' commentary he gives the following story:
 - i. "There was once a poor negress on the Island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. She had worked hard and saved long and had finally amassed enough money to purchase the freedom of her daughter, a slave like herself, from the man who owned them both. She was happy to remain a slave herself simply for the joy of seeing her daughter walking around free – with shoes on her feet, the badge of freedom. No slave was allowed to wear shoes. Not long after the transaction had occurred the mother came into a room where her daughter was sitting. In her usual affectionate way she sat down beside her daughter as she had always done. In a moment or two, the daughter turned on her in a rage and exclaimed, 'How dare you sit down in my presence? Do you not know that I am a free woman, and you are a slave? Rise instantly, and leave the room!'" (Dale Ralph Davis, 2 Kings, pg. 194)
- c. This is what the heart of Israel was like too. The white hot heat of the mercy of God could not melt their cold and stubborn hearts. They would not turn from the sins of Jeroboam. They disregarded the very mercy they were given because that mercy was intended to turn them from their sins but rather they continued on in them. They not only continued on in their calf worship, but they also allowed the Asherah pole to remain in Samaria. This is a significant statement in verse 6. You will remember that Jehoahaz's father, Jehu, had purged the land of Baal worship in dramatic fashion. But his motives seemed to be more about political maneuvering

than about whole hearted worship for Yahweh. This is proven to be true in this verse because he allowed and Jehoahaz continued the worship of Asherah. So, to put this in perspective, Baal worship was particularly vile and obviously pagan. But Asherah was thought to be the goddess of the sea who was considered to be the mother of the gods. It was thought that she and El had consorted and Baal was the result. So, they didn't worship Baal, just his mother!

- d. This is what the human heart is prone to do with mercy. The human heart is so vile and desperately wicked that even mountainous mercy does not guarantee faithfulness. Rather the human heart's tendency is to take mercy and see it as license. You see the oppression had had the right effect in the heart of Jehoahaz. It had turned him away from any other god and turned him to the one true God, at least in this area of seeking help. This was part of what God had sent the sword of Syria to accomplish. He was using oppression to turn their hearts back to Him, and in part this worked, but then mercy was abused as the people continued on in their false worship.
- e. You see, Israel did not want God's answer or direction, just his salvation. They didn't want to have him as their God, they just wanted to have him as their savior. They didn't want to be accountable to Him, they just wanted him to rescue them. How very vogue of Ancient Israel! They would all fit right into our own times wouldn't they? So often we want the rescue of God as long as it is absent of the directive of God. We want to be saved, but we do not want to be subservient. We want to be helped but not transformed. Do you see how terribly selfish this is? Do you see how this puts man at the center of the situation when we want God to save us, but we don't want God to direct us or hold us accountable to worship Him? And yet, it is this selfish heart which often dominates our response to God's work in our lives. We take this glorious salvation he has provided through Christ and we abuse this mercy as though it is all there simply for us. May the 'nevertheless' not be said about us. May we not be like Israel who was given great mercy and was left unchanged by that mercy as they continued on in worshiping at the altar of other gods. May this unthinkable mercy of God that compels him to listen to the most vile of sinners produce in us hearts that singularly worship this one true God who alone is worthy of that kind of worship.

III. Covenant Commitment Brought Both the Sword and the Savior

- a. The last observation I want to draw your attention to this morning is that Covenant commitment brought both the sword and the savior. So, to remind you where we have been, we have seen that the sender of the sword is the sender of the savior, and the sword and the savior do not guarantee repentance, and now we see that covenant commitment brought both the sword and the savior.
- b. Verses 22-23 are the words of commentary by the writer about this whole situation. He tells us again in verse 22 that Jehoahaz was oppressed all his days by Hazael the king of Syria. And then in verse 23 we see the commentary given about God's interaction with his people in light of their oppression. The writer says that God was gracious and compassionate to them, and that he turned toward them and that he would not destroy them, or throw them out of his presence up until this point in the narrative. And why was this true? Well, the writer ties the grace, compassion, and forbearance of God to the covenant that he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But before we consider this, consider also that the sword of Syria that was described in verse 22 was also a function of the covenant that God had made with Israel.
- c. You see, the covenant that God has made with the nation requires of them that they tell the truth about the God that they represent. They are to be His people bearing His name and making Him known through word and life. But these 10 Northern Tribes have not ever told the truth about God. As a people, from day one they have proven to be idolaters and in need of the

sword of justice. He has himself promised that he would send this sword of justice against his covenant people as a function of this very covenant. Turn with me to Leviticus 26.

- d. In this chapter the text is detailing for the people again how God will generally act towards them. If they will but walk in His commandments, and explicitly the commandments to not make idols and keep his Sabbath and reverence his sanctuary – all as signs of their belief that he alone is the Lord – then he will bring the consequence of obedience which will be filled with rain for their fields, good crops from their land, safety from their enemies, and most importantly, identification with Yahweh as their God as he promised to walk among them and be their God. But then in verse 14 we have the Lord's words about what would happen if they did not remain faithful to having Him as their Lord. *Read verses 14-25.*
- e. Did you catch that – the vengeance for the covenant? Because they are His covenant people and he is their covenant God, if they disobey and worship other gods, He will send the sword that will execute the vengeance for the covenant. So, the sword is a function of covenant. Because they were His people who were called by His name, and because they knew the grounds of the covenant before they ever entered into it, they are being held accountable in our passage in 2 Kings 13 because of their covenant unfaithfulness.
- f. But then, as we go back to 2 Kings we also see that the savior is a function of this covenant as well. So our writer in 2 Kings tells us explicitly that though the people of Israel would not turn from the sins of idolatry, their God turned to them because of the covenant that he had established with their forefathers. He would not destroy them, though he has promised covenant vengeance for his people if they will not singularly worship Him. So because of his covenant he sends both the sword and the savior. Now, we will see as we get to chapter 17 that the sword will ultimately come as the people will be carted off into exile and will be ruled by those who hate them, just as Leviticus 26 promised. But here we are in chapter 13 and there is yet another generation of idol worshipers that God is showing mercy to. So, the question natural arises, why does he delay his covenant vengeance, this sword of justice? Why does he endure yet another generation of covenant breakers? Why not just end the mockery now? Why endure any more covenant breaking? Let me suggest three possibilities:
 - i. To make known His Manifold Glory
 1. In God's covenant patience we see the manifold glory of God. There is not just a few aspects to God's character that are full of glory, but in his entire person and work He displays a glory that far exceeds anything or anyone else. In the delay of bringing covenant vengeance the Lord is displaying his steadfast love and the slowness to anger that dominates His character. He puts on display that He is both a God of perfect justice and perfect mercy. Only in God is it possible for these to never contradict or argue with one another. Only God knows when justice can be delayed so that mercy can abound. And in this we see the unmatched glory of God.
 - ii. To Allow the Fullness of Sin
 1. God also sends the savior and delays the sword so as to allow for the fullness of sin. In other words, by the time we get to chapter 17 no one will be screaming foul about God's actions. We will not read of their exile to Assyria and wonder why God didn't give them one more chance! Rather, we will read those words in a few chapters and be amazed that they didn't come much sooner. We will be awed by the covenant mercy afforded God's people, and we will have no doubt about the

covenant unfaithfulness of God's people. There will be no doubt that the nation deserved the righteous judgment of God. He surely cannot be accused of unjust wrath or of a sword that was brought too quickly. But this can only happen if God delays justice in our text. So, in part God delays justice so as to allow for the fullness of sin.

iii. To Make Known Relationship over Religion

1. And he also allows for the delay of the vengeance of the covenant because he longs to make known to all people of all times that he is after relationship and not religion. Now, generally this phrase is misused and honestly it makes me nervous because it seems to me that it is often a way to minimize the functions of a right relationship with God and call them religion, and to elevate the personal preference of each Christian and call that relationship. But that is another subject for another day. What we see in our text this morning is that God delays his sword of justice and yet again sends a savior because he desires to make known relationship over religion.
2. So, if this was all about religion then they could just do good things, make the right sacrifices and secure the favor of this God. Or by neglecting Him they could guarantee His quick disfavor and work against them. In other words, religion is all about working the system to your own advantage. It is about manipulating the celestial powers, whatever and whoever you believe them to be, so that you can use them to get what you want. So, you want eternal life, okay here is how you work the system. You do what is good and right, you pay money to the church, you work hard to atone for your sins, and on and on the list goes. You do and do and do and do some more because religion is about working the system to your advantage. But that is not what the one true God is all about. He is not after manipulators, but worshipers. He does not simply want the exchange of religious deeds for personal benefit. Rather, he has always been a God who made us for a relationship with Him. And by relationship I mean, He made us in his image and after his likeness so that we could see his glory and respond in ways that the rest of creation cannot. He created us so that we could see the fullness of his great glory and respond to it with heart-originated worship.
3. So, what we see in his delay of the vengeance for the covenant in chapter 13 is a display of this yet again. Had he just immediately sent the sword of justice and dealt with His covenant people like they deserved then it could be surmised that He was a god like all of the other supposed gods who was simply interested in the forms of worship and the activity of religion. But his delay makes it abundantly clear that He is interested in these people. He loves them and longs for them. He so desires a right relationship with Him where they see and know His glory and worship him in all of life that he willingly endures their wickedness so as to patiently call them to this right relationship. This has been the message of every prophet who has declared the Lord's word to this people. Return to the Lord. He is delaying his justice now, but it is coming. Repent and restore this right relationship with the Lord your God. You see, this delay of justice allowed for the point to be made loud and clear that God is interested in relationship with his beloved, not just religious manipulation.

Conclusion: So we have seen this morning that the sender of the sword is the sender of the savior and that the sword and the savior do not guarantee repentance. We have also seen that the covenant commitment brought both the sword and the savior. These are fundamental and unchangeable realities of the God of Heaven. He sends both the sword and the savior. In fact, at this time of year we are reminded that he has sent the savior of the world, Jesus Christ. And he has sent this Savior because without the Savior all men would be subject to the sword of justice. You see all men are guilty before God. All men have sinned and with that sin all men have earned the sword of justice which will one day bring eternal death. God must do this because He is a righteous God and sin cannot go unpunished. But the sword of justice has been delayed up until today for those of us in this room. We have not yet faced the Creator God and answered for our rebellion against Him. We have not yet been called upon by Him to give an account of what we have done with the vast mercy he has shown each of us. But this sword of justice will not always be delayed. Today may be the day of your last breath, and as Hebrews 9:27 makes known, "It is appointed unto man to die once, and after this the judgment."

But the glory of Christmas is that the God of Heaven has sent a Savior from the sword of justice. As Romans 5:8-9 says:

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

(Rom 5:8-9 ESV)

Jesus came, Jesus lived without sin, Jesus died for us, so that we could be saved by him from the wrath of God. He does not simply allow us to escape the sword of justice by performing some act of spiritual hocus pocus, but rather Jesus saves us from the sword of justice because he willingly took that sword of justice on our behalf. The sender of the sword is the sender of the savior so that we can be saved from the sword and enjoy abundant and eternal life.

But just because he has sent the savior does not mean that your heart is automatically right with Him. What have you done with this Savior? May it not be said of you that you were given great mercy and grace and nevertheless you would not turn from your rebellious and idolatrous ways. May today be the day of salvation for you unbeliever. And for you believer, may today be a day of remembering and rightly responding to the vast amounts of mercy and grace that have been spent on you by the God of Heaven. Do not be a "nevertheless" kind of Christian. But rather, be a "therefore" kind of Christian. God has saved you by his mercy and grace, therefore you will seek Him and live for Him and rightly worship Him today. Let's pray!