

“Joash: The Boy King Who Saved & Endangered Christmas”

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

2 Chronicles 22:10-24:27

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Chronicles 22, 2 Chronicles chapter 22.

After a long night with two very rambunctious little kids the babysitter was so thrilled to see the clock strike 8pm. Finally, it was bedtime! The only problem with this plan was that little kids who are bouncing off the walls do not generally take very well to bed time. But by the time the parents arrived home at 10pm the house was quiet and the kids were asleep. The parents were delightfully surprised by this and as they handed the babysitter the money and walked her to the door the father was still so shocked that she had no problems getting them to go to bed and so he asked her again, “so, you really had no problems getting them to go to sleep?” She politely replied – “Well, I did promise them that you would buy them a pony if they would go to bed, so I am sure that helped a little.”

So often we treat a promise this way. We find ourselves in a bind needing to reassure someone else of something that we intend to make happen and so we promise them that we will do it. In fact, at best man's promise is but a pledge of intention. We have no way to tell the future, not even to speak of controlling it. Our best intentions that we confirm to someone else through a promise can quickly be derailed by some unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstance. So, for instance, I can say to my kids that I promise to bounce on the trampoline with them when I get home from work, but my best intention can be derailed by any number of uncontrollable circumstances. The best we can do is give a pledge of our intention and call it a promise. But so many of us have been on the hurtful end of broken promises way too many times, and so therefore a promise carries very little value to us anymore.

But this is not the kind of promise in the text before us this morning. There is a promise from God that weaves a thread throughout the life and reign of Joash of Judah. And what this makes clear to us this morning is that while man's promise is but a pledge of intention, the *promise of God is a decree of His will as a guarantee of the future*. A promise from God is not simply his declaration of his good intention that may or may not come to pass, but rather His promise is a word of guarantee that sets forth the decree of his will. And once it passes His lips it is unbreakable.

Well, long before the events of 2 Chronicles 22 there was a promise made by God to David in 2 Samuel 7. There he said to David, “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Sam. 7:16 ESV) God had decreed his plan for the future. David's throne and kingdom would be established forever. This means that though other dynasties would come and go, there would be one that would remain. Though other royal lineage would fade into the pages of history, David's line would continue on forever. It is this promise that carried through for some 1000 years until that glorious day that we will be again celebrating in 2 ½ weeks. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of David, was born, and through Him the throne of David will be established forever. It is this promise to David that weaves its way throughout the events of the life of Joash. Joash is a descendant of David. And in fact, as best we can tell, by verse 12 of chapter 22 he is the only son of David that is still alive. The Promise of God has come within one breath of not being fulfilled. But, take heart, Christmas is saved by a courageous husband and wife duo who sneakily save the child from the power hungry sword of his own grandmother. As we work our way through the passage I want to point you to two truths about this Promise making and promise keeping God. The first this morning is that the promise of God directs the providence of God.

But before we make that point from the text, I want to set the stage for you. In verse 10 we read:

Athaliah's son was Ahaziah, and he was the son of Jehoram. So Athaliah is Jehoram's wife, and she was also Ahab's daughter. You remember that back when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah he wanted to seek peace with the northern kingdom so he gave his son, Jehoram, in marriage to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. Well, this friendship with the Baal-worshipping royal family from the north continued strong throughout Jehoram's reign and on into his son Ahaziah's reign. In fact, this is how Ahaziah died. He went up to see his good buddy, the son of Ahab and therefore his uncle, who was also named Jehoram who was the king of Israel at the time, and he just so happened to go see him on the day that Jehu brought the sword of justice upon the house of Ahab per the Lord's command and so Ahaziah was slain too. When Athaliah, who is the queen mother, received word that her son has been killed by the sword of Jehu she decides to seize the opportunity for a monumental power grab and so she destroyed all the royal family of the house of Judah. This is significant because this is the last in a string of decimations to the line of David. In chapter 21 we read of how her husband, Jehoram, killed all of his brothers, who would have been descendants of David. Then, also in chapter 21, the Philistines and Arabians come and raid the nation and take Jehoram's older sons captive and eventually kill them. We looked last week at how Jehoram's son, Ahaziah, was killed by Jehu, and we also saw how Jehu also slaughtered 42 members of the royal household. Now here comes Athaliah hacking her way through the family tree. We don't know for sure that Joash is the only surviving member of the Davidic line at this point in history, but it sure seems probable. If nothing else, the line has funneled down to a pretty narrow channel at this point in history. And yet, by God's providential act, the line is spared and Christmas is saved.

Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada are the key characters as the drama unfolds to unseat the queen and save the Davidic line. It becomes obvious as you investigate their actions and evaluate their words that the promise of God to David was a central concern that propelled them to risky action. Now, Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada are married, and Jehoshabeath is also the sister of Ahaziah - which makes her the daughter or at least the step-daughter of Athaliah. Jehoiada is also the high priest, which gives him great access to men who can help him carry out the coup to depose of Athaliah. By the middle of chapter 23 Athaliah is dead and the 7 year old Joash is on the throne because of the daring acts of his aunt and uncle, Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada. The people of the land are thrilled and the text tells us explicitly in verse 21 that the city was at peace and tranquility after the death of the Baal worshipping Athaliah.

The coronation of the new king was not simply about getting rid of a wicked queen and getting the better option on the throne. No, it was about the covenant God who had promised to keep a people for himself and who had promised that David's throne would be established forever. So, in verse 3 of chapter 23 all of the leaders of the people are gathered in Jerusalem by the direction of Jehoiada to plan their coup and he shows them Joash and led them in making a covenant with the king and then Jehoiada says this, "Behold, the king's son! Let him reign, as the Lord spoke concerning the sons of David." The promise of God to David was a central concern to Jehoiada. Then again in 23:16 Jehoiada, who is the high priestly uncle of the 7 year old Joash who has just been anointed and crowned as king of Judah, leads the people in renewing the covenant and reestablishing the primacy of the Temple worship in the land. The people knew that renewal of covenant commitments meant the removal of competing commitments and so they marched to the house of Baal and destroyed it. So, by the end of chapter 23, Athaliah is dead, the 7 year old Joash is on the throne, Baal worship is extinguished from the city, the people are renewed in their covenant relationship with Yahweh God, and the Temple is again at the center of worship. And all of this can be linked directly to Jehoiada's belief in a promise keeping God.

Then in chapter 24 Joash comes of age and notices that the Temple is in grave disrepair and needs some serious attention. Initially the priests neglect the king's orders to collect money and repair the Temple and so Joash

intervenes and collects the money and distributes it to workers to get the Temple back in good repair. And so in verse 13 of chapter 24 we read:

“So those who were engaged in the work labored, and the repairing went forward in their hands, and they restored the house of God to its proper condition and strengthened it.”

But then in the matter of a few verses we see one of the great reversals of Scripture. Joash who has just re-established the Temple and seemingly followed in all the ways of the Lord, is seen in verse 18 allowing idol worship back into center stage through the influence of ungodly princes of the land. Jehoiada had died and Joash was swayed and turned from the Lord. In some of the most shocking verses in Scripture we read of Joash's most unbelievable and wicked act. *Read verses 20-22.* This wicked act leads to his premature demise as the Lord sends the Syrians against him and he is wounded in battle and eventually assassinated by two of his own servants who are avenging the death of Zechariah. And so by the end of chapter 24 Joash is dead, but the line of David continues as his son Amaziah sits on the throne.

Alright, let's take a deep breath. That was a fly-over of the facts about these events so that you have the groundwork in place to understand some conclusions about our promise keeping God. I think this is central to the passage at hand. God makes and keeps promises and this life of Joash puts that on display. The first conclusion to be made is that the promise of God directs the providence of God.

I. The Promise of God Directs the Providence of God

- a. Isn't this what we see happening in the text? God has made a promise, and by this we understand that he has made a decree of his will about future events. This is how it is going to be, and what we see in these chapters is the feet on the ground of God's providential working to ensure that the promise comes to pass. It is the promise of God that directs the providence of God.
- b. I would even argue that the expressions of evil that we saw early on that nearly extinguished the line of David were born out of hearts provoked by the promise of God to do everything they could to thwart that very promise. How else do you explain a Grandmother viciously killing her own offspring, many of whom were probably not very old? They posed no current threat in that they could not raise a coup against her, but they posed a threat because they were of David's line. She was not. She was half-Phoenician and half-Israelite. She wasn't even from the southern tribes over which she ruled. It wouldn't have been hard for the people to raise a coup against her in the name of seating a rightful heir on the throne no matter how young he was. And it turns out that her fears were well founded because that is exactly what happened when Jehoiada conspired to seat the 7 year old Joash on the throne. Athaliah was provoked by the promise to wickedly conspire to expunge the means of the promise being fulfilled.
- c. The Promise Often Provokes Evil, which then requires the Providence of God
 - i. What we see in God's response to this is that when evil is provoked to more evil because of the promise that has been given, the powerful providence of God is required to make sure that the means of the promise being kept are saved. So, in progression of thought here – the promise often provokes evil, which then requires the providence of God in order to save the means by which the promise will be fulfilled.
 - ii. So, it wouldn't take you long to think through some Biblical examples of this. Just think of Moses and the people cornered at the Red Sea with the Egyptians behind them. The Egyptian Pharaoh was provoked by the promise that these were God's people and that he needed to let them go to the Promised Land. But his evil was interfered with by the powerful providence of God as the Sea split open and God's people were saved by walking across on dry ground. Or, just think of Christ's promise to build His Church and the subsequent evil against that very promise that has been provoked for almost 2000 years. And yet, the promise retains its power as God has again and again sovereignly

intervened in the persecution of the Church to secure his promise and save his people. This is how Satan passes his time. He attacks the means of the promises of God being kept in this world and seeks to destroy God's plan. But God's providence is too great to be overthrown and therefore His plan is secure.

- iii. This powerful working of God to ensure the keeping of his promise happens in surprisingly normal ways through the lives of extraordinarily normal people. So, another way to say this is that the promise is kept by extraordinary providence in ordinary lives.
- d. The Promise is kept by Extraordinary Providence in Ordinary Lives
 - i. Consider first the daughter or step-daughter of Athaliah. Jehoshabeath knew the intent of the evil queen and she knew there was only one hope of rescue. Joash must have been so new to the family that Athaliah had little to no knowledge of him and so Jehoshabeath masterfully carries out the baby's escape and hides him in the one place where Athaliah is sure to not look – the Temple of Yahweh. In the scheme of things, Jehoshabeath is really a nobody on the pages of history. She is never mentioned again in Scripture and her life proves to be pretty common. But her bravery in the face of evil was anything but common. God used this lady in pretty ordinary, albeit exciting, ways to spare the promise by saving the child. There was no thunderous voice from Heaven telling Athaliah to spare Joash. There was no angel with a flaming sword of fire posted at the door to Joash's room. Rather, it was hiding him in the mattress supply closet and eventually moving him to their residence at the Temple. These are pretty ordinary means by a pretty ordinary lady that God used to secure the means of keeping his promise.
 - ii. Then think of Jehoiada. This man was the high priest, so he had some position in the kingdom, but this was not the time of Judah's history where being the high priest was a glamorous job. Athaliah and her wicked family had long since despised the Temple worship and they had even taken stones from the structure to use elsewhere and thereby made breeches in the wall. They had plundered the Temple's treasury and taken the sacred vessels for use in the house of Baal. This was not a pretty time to be in charge of the Temple and over the priesthood. Not only that, but we are told in 24:15 that Jehoiada died at the ripe old age of 130. It is impossible to know at what point in Joash's reign Jehoiada died, but it was at least after the 23rd year. So, to put Jehoiada's life in perspective consider the fact that he was somewhere between 91 and 106 when he led the charge to assassinate Athaliah and enthrone the 7 year old son of David. Let me say that again. He was between 91 and 106 years old when he started this whole thing! And this was not a one-time deal of brave intervention. We are told in the 2 Kings account of Jehoiada that Joash stayed faithful to the Lord during the life of Jehoiada because of his teaching. So, not only was Jehoiada used greatly by God in his old age to save Christmas, but he was also a continuing influence for good upon the life of Joash. So much so that 24:16 tells us that he received an honor that no other non-king is afforded in the Scriptures – he was buried in the king's royal tombs within the city limits of Jerusalem. He was an ordinary man who was used in extraordinary ways by the powerful providence of God.
 - iii. But the passage that shows this the clearest is 24:1-3. *Read 1-3.* It's as if things are just continuing on as they have always been. This is the basic formula that the writer of Chronicles has used as he has given us the accounts of these kings. The king's name, followed by how old he was, or what year it was in relationship to other dynasties, and how long he reigned over the people. And yet, this simple formulaic statement is pregnant with the extraordinary providence of God. And isn't this so often how God – who will keep his promises – works in his world to make sure that those promises are

kept? And yet, we clamor after great expressions of God's sovereign power – longing to see the supernatural because we are bored with the mundane. But yet, as we see from Joash's life, the mundane providence of God is often how God works to ensure His promise.

- iv. As Dale Ralph Davis has said, "Surely we recognize that many of God's gifts come wrapped in plain brown paper packages – and yet they are gifts for all that. Mundane mercies are mercies nonetheless and prosaic provisions are still provisions. If the Lord has granted us a civil order where we can 'lead a peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way' (I Tim. 2:2), that is no less a boon for all its apparent ordinariness. Actually, there are no petty providences." (Davis, *2 Kings*, pg. 185)
- v. Do you believe that Christian – that there are no petty providences? Sure God could supernaturally intervene in our lives in ways that draw a crowd, but how much more glorious is a God who can use ordinary means to keep those same promises? Is this not supernatural as well? Is this not just as, or dare I say, all the more glorious? Just consider Christ's promise to build His church. He decreed His will when Jesus said, "I will build my church." The promise is secure and the completion of that promise has been on the march for 2000 years. And yet how has he kept that promise? Well, by and large he has kept that promise by supernaturally stirring in ordinary people to hear the Gospel, be transformed by the Gospel, and tell others about that Gospel. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. God's preferred method for keeping His promise is through ordinary means which I think makes His providence all the more extraordinary.
- vi. Now to be clear, there was more than one promise at play in Joash's life. He was the current beneficiary of the promise to David, but he was not indispensable. God had also promised his people that if they turned from following Him and broke the covenant of singular worship and obedience to Him that he would send judgments and curses upon them. And so, in rather ordinary ways, we see this very thing happen in the life of Joash. After the death of Jehoiada he heeds terrible counsel and allows the worship of idols to have prominence in Jerusalem again. He then refuses to heed the direct revelation of God through Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, and even directly commands that Zechariah be put to death for his prophetic word of condemnation. Well, God will not stand for this, and so he sends the Syrians to keep another promise that he has made. And so in 24:23 we read: *Read 24:23-24*. God kept his promise through the ordinary means of an enemy nation attacking Jerusalem and having great success. Do you see again the ordinary means by which God prefers to keep His promises and thereby bring glory to Himself?
- vii. So, we have seen that the Promise of God directs the Providence of God and that this providence often comes through ordinary means. The other conclusion I must show you about this promise keeping God is that He demands our response.

II. The Providentially Promise Keeping God Demands Our Response

- a. I don't mean to say here that there is a point in the text where we are called to respond to this providentially promise keeping God, but I am saying that this is what this story is all about. The faithful and unfaithful alike are responding to this providentially promise keeping God.
- b. Belief in the Promise Keeping God propels God-Honoring Risk
 - i. Consider first the faithful, or maybe better stated – the believing. Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada definitely believed the promise of God. In fact, I would argue that they had committed their lives to singular worship of Yahweh God even in the milieu of a nation run amuck in the slop of idolatry. This may be taking some liberty with the text, because we are never told explicitly that they were singular worshipers of Yahweh, but their lives sure do tell the story. The proof is in the pudding for this couple. And in fact, I think it is

right in our evaluation of their lives to see that their belief in God as one who will keep His promises propelled them to take this God-honoring risk that ultimately spared the line of David from the assassin's sword. Jehoshabeath was propelled by her belief in her promise-keeping God that she was willing to risk her own life and the life of her entire family to be a part of God's plan. If it had not been Jehoshabeath it would have been someone else because God's promise would not fall to the ground, but it didn't have to go farther than this woman because she was propelled into action by her unshakable belief in her promise-keeping God. Jehoiada was the same way. He endured the pitiful and awful reign of Athaliah and in the seventh year his righteous soul could take no more. Being propelled by his belief in the promise-keeping God he took a risk that honored that very God. He led a coup and dethroned a wicked dynasty and led the nation in covenant renewal because he believed that God would keep his promises – all of them.

- ii. This is what belief does – it changes you. And I am not talking about the kind of belief that hopes something will be a certain way, but rather the kind of biblical belief that propels us to walk in faith as we are confident that God will keep His promise. This strikes at the very heart of the Christian life. Do you believe what God has said in such a way that it propels in your life God-glorifying risk? So, for instance, do you believe God when he says that he will build His church and subsequently does this belief propel you to investment in the fulfillment of that promise? Are you willing to take God-glorifying risk in order to be the ordinary means by which God will fulfill that promise? When you are face to face with that unbelieving friend or co-worker and they open the door of opportunity for you to share the message of the Gospel with them – do you believe God in such a way that you are willing in that moment to take the risk of losing them as a friend, or of them thinking you're a religious nut, or of being totally rejected – do you believe God's promise that he will build His church so that in that moment you are willing to take the risk to speak the truth in love?
- iii. Or, how about this - do you believe, as Paul did, that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you? And explicitly in the context of that statement Paul is talking about learning how to be content in all things, learning how to live with little or much because he has found true life in Christ and can therefore face anything – whether plenty or want – because he is in Christ. So, when you come face to face today with that loss in your life where you would say that there is great need – whether it is financial, or relational, or physical – whatever it is – can you take the next step knowing that Christ is sufficient as you rely on Him? Can you risk giving up your own answers to the problem and allow Christ to be sufficient? Or do you have to wrestle him for control at every step seeking satisfaction outside of His person?
- iv. Or, how about - are you willing to risk giving up your supposed control of your life to rest all things upon the promise that God is at work in all things to bring you into conformity to Jesus Christ? In other words, are you willing to risk missing out on getting what you think you want in life so that you can have what God knows is absolutely best? Are you willing to allow the Spirit of God to powerfully work in your life through the rather ordinary stuff of life like a flat tire, or an illness, or a stubborn child to bring you to greater conformity to Jesus? You see, God has promised that he will do this through the ordinary stuff of life. Don't get me wrong – it is anything but ordinary as the Spirit of God supernaturally moves in your life and in mine to powerfully change us with His truth. But this supernatural work often comes in quite ordinary ways as God sovereignly orchestrates all things in our lives together for good so that we will be conformed to Christ.

- v. Or, how about - are you willing to risk your very life for the sake of being a rather ordinary part of God's providential fulfillment of His plan? Did you know that the great missionary, Adoniram Judson, labored in Burma for 6 years before he saw even one convert? At year three he was asked upon what basis he had any hope of ultimate success in the mission to bring the Gospel to a needy land and his reply was, "As much as there is a God who will fulfill all His promises." Because Judson believed that God would indeed keep his promises of rescuing some from every tribe, tongue, and nation through the redemption that is found only in Jesus, he was willing to risk all so as to be one of the ordinary means by which God accomplished his powerfully providential plan. And indeed He did, for through Judson's ministry untold thousands came to Christ and hundreds of churches were planted.
- vi. God is a promise keeping God. You either believe this or you don't. If you believe it, this belief will evidence itself in your life in that you will be willing to take risks that honor God as you seek to be an ordinary means by which God providentially keeps his promises. But belief isn't the only response we see in the text.
- c. Unbelief in the Promise Keeping God Yields Blatant Disregard
 - i. There are many evidences of unbelief in these few chapters, but Joash is the poster boy. He started so well and was trained by the best. He had every opportunity at success, but when his mentor was gone and he was thrown to the wolves of the world he caved on his beliefs and blatantly disregarded God.
 - ii. This is poignantly shown in how he responds to the direct word of the Lord condemning the idolatry that he was allowing. In 24:19 we read of how God patiently sent prophets among the people to bring them back to Yahweh, but they would not listen. Then, this prophetic word is proclaimed out of the mouth of Zechariah in verse 20. Now, remember that Jehoiada was 130 years old when he died, so I am guessing that by this point in Joash's reign, which I presume to be soon after Jehoiada's death, Zechariah is no spring chicken. He may be approaching 100 himself at this point. But Joash is probably in his early to mid-forties. So, though Joash is the king, you would think that with all of their history and with the vast age difference - if anyone is going to have a hearing with Joash to convince him that this idol worship is wrong it will be Zechariah. And to be clear, it is not just Zechariah venting his opinion in the open square. No, the text says that the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah and he stood above the people and spoke the very words of God. These words were words of promise. Because they have forsaken the Lord he has forsaken them.
 - iii. You would think that this would cause fear and consternation in Joash's heart. You would think that he would be broken at the voice of the Lord through the mouth of this man that he should have a ton of respect for. You would think that repentance would not be too far away. But no, Joash partakes in the conspiracy and gives his command to have Zechariah executed. You see, by this point Joash had no concern for the covenant keeping God. He apparently did not believe that God had forsaken him and his people because they had forsaken Yahweh God. Apparently he thought that there were other gods who could serve them equally as well or from whom they could find all that they needed. Oh how wrong unbelief in God always proves to be. Within a matter of words in the text Joash is being attacked by Syria, and a few words later he is lying in his sick bed because he was wounded in battle and a few words after that he is dead at the hands of two of his servants.
 - iv. One other detail of Joash's blatant disregard for God is found in 2 Kings 12 where we read of how Joash emptied the Temple treasury and took the sacred instruments of the Temple and used them as a payment to get Syria to turn away his military campaign from

them. So, when you put the two accounts together you learn that at this late point in life Syria comes against Jerusalem and has great victory and the only thing that stops them from totally destroying Joash is that Joash emptied the Temple Treasury and paid them off. How does one go from collecting money to repair the Temple to taking all the costly things out of the Temple to pay someone off to save your own skin? This is truly despicable in the eyes of the Lord, and how he treats the Temple of the Lord speaks volumes about what he thinks about the Lord of that Temple.

- v. You see, Joash didn't really seem to believe that God was a God who kept His promises. Though he of all people, whose very life was spared and whose reign was established simply because God does keep his promises, though he of all people should believe, he didn't. And his unbelief is glaringly obvious by his blatant disregard for God. And so, the boy king who saved Christmas by simply living and having descendants, grows up into a king who endangers Christmas by his wicked unbelief. Of course, Christmas is never really in danger because God will keep His promise, but unbelief always displays itself in blatant disregard for this promise keeping God.

Conclusion: So, I wonder, what is your response to this providentially promise keeping God? You don't have a choice. You have to respond to this promise keeping God. You can either believe it and stake your life and eternity upon Him, or you can disbelieve and blatantly disregard. To do nothing is an expression of unbelief because belief in this promise keeping God doesn't leave one idle. If you say this morning that like Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath you believe in this promise keeping God, then I ask you, what God-honoring risk is the propelling you to take in your life? Where can you connect the dots in your life and say – because God will keep this promise I will risk this because if I don't I will remain idle in the carrying out of God's plan which will betray my own underlying unbelief. Or maybe you can connect the dots and find that you are blatantly disregarding God because you don't believe that he will keep His promises. May God help us by the powerful working of His Spirit, through the rather ordinary means of listening to preaching to connect these dots and make Christ-honoring changes in how we view this promise keeping God that will propel God-honoring risk. Let's pray.

Benediction:

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1Pe 5:10-11 ESV)