

“Jotham & Ahaz: Order & Disorder”

Who's the Boss? – A series on the Kings *2 Chronicles 27-28*

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Chronicles 27, 2 Chronicles chapter 27.

I want to start this morning with simply giving you the point of the message. Here it is - Whether in success or distress we must seek our help from the Lord. This is a basic and a simple message, but yet it appears over and over and over again in the Scriptures. And yet again in our text – this is exactly what we see illustrated by these two kings.

Jotham is a man who orders his ways according to the Lord and in so doing he strengthens himself in the Lord. But Ahaz is a man who does the exact opposite. From the very beginning of his reign he is a man committed to seeking any god but the God of His people. And the contrast of these men's lives is matched by the contrast in the outcomes of these two lives. Jotham strengthens the nation and makes it strong, while Ahaz destroys the nation and leads it to ruin and the brink of captivity. So, the obvious message of their lives is that whether there is success or distress we must seek our help from the Lord.

This is a vital message for the first recipients of these words from God. Most likely Ezra and his associates penned the book of 1 & 2 Chronicles, and it was written to the nation of Israel after she had seen the promised end of her idolatry – exile! Ezra was one of the priests used by God to lead a group of God's people back from exile into God's land. They were a hurting people in a very difficult situation and they needed to be reminded of their history so that they could have true success in the present. And so these books provide that history lesson for them, and these two chapters in particular point them to the universal truth that whether in success or distress we must seek our help from the Lord. So, let us consider together these two lives. In success Jotham sought the Lord's help.

I. In Success Jotham Sought the Lord's Ways

- a. You will remember that last week we looked at 5 different kings who ruled over the ten northern tribes of Israel and how they did evil in the sight of the Lord – this showed us the cyclical pattern of evil in the heart of man – how one generation tends to continue on in the sins of the previous generation. Now this week we look at the kings who ruled in the Southern 2 Tribes of Israel during this time, and we will see the positive side of the strengths of one generation being passed on to another. Jotham's dad, Uzziah, was a king who was instructed in a right fear of the Lord and who ordered his ways after the Lord and the Lord blessed Him with great strength and success. But then later in life when he was strong he grew proud and he went into the Holy Place of the Temple to offer incense that only the priests were supposed to do. This prideful act caused his destruction, and his son, Jotham soon ruled in his place. So Jotham came to the throne at a time when the nation was in a good position because of the strength that his dad had shown. It was a time of success that only continued on into Jotham's reign.
- b. We are told in verse 2 that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just like Uzziah had done – except that he didn't go into the Temple in pride-filled bravado like his dad had done. Verses 3-5 tell us of how he continued the building and strengthening plan that his father had started. And how he was able to build forts and towers in strategic places and win decisively in battle over the Ammonites so that they paid him substantial tribute for three years. Jotham was

doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord and he was enjoying the blessing of God upon the Kingdom as they enjoyed great success.

c. *And was Strengthened*

- i. So, the cause and effect of all of this continuing success during the reign of Jotham is summed up in verse 6. “So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the Lord His God.” The first phrase – Jotham became mighty – has a reflexive idea which could be translated – Jotham strengthened himself. Now, none of the major translations have it this way because it would make it look like Jotham was the source of his strength, but that is cleared up for us in the next part of the verse where it says – because he ordered his ways before the Lord his God. In other words, Jotham did indeed bring strength to his life and his reign and he did that by ordering his ways before the Lord. It is not that he found strength within himself. It is not that he pulled himself up by his bootstraps and rallied the troops and led the nation to great success. No – he simply ordered his ways before the Lord. Literally – he established his ways in front of the face of God. He valued the Lord God and he feared the Lord God in the sense that he viewed all of life through the lens of Yahweh God. Therefore he set the course of his life so as to be pleasing in the sight of the Lord his God. And in doing this he strengthened himself.
- ii. At first glance this may seem a bit too close to works righteousness type theology for us to be comfortable with. So, we may see in Jotham someone who did what God said and this obedience was blessed with great success. So, does this mean then that is all you have to do is live right outwardly and do the right things and then God will bless you? Well, that is not what is happening with Jotham, and that is not what God promises with us either. What is happening with Jotham is that he is God’s human king over God’s unique covenant people in God’s Promised Land. God has a plan that is at work and his covenant people are at the center of that plan during these Old Testament days. There was a clear promise and a clear precedent that if these kings of God’s people would establish their ways before Him He would establish their throne through blessing and success. David and Solomon are the premier examples of this, and now this son of David – Jotham – is experiencing the same thing. This promised blessing that fell on God’s anointed king was not simply for the self-exaltation of the king, but rather it was to establish the nation as a strong and powerful people who were a blessing to all the nations of the Earth. The blessing was to advance the glory of the God who gave the blessing, not to the king who received it.
- iii. So, you are right to be a bit squeamish about this part of the text. This does not create a promise to you that if you would simply order your ways before the Lord then you could enjoy the unmatched physical success and blessings of the Lord. You are not God’s king over God’s people; but there is a general and universal principle here for all of God’s people. Seeking to establish your life according to the Lord’s ways will bring the Lord’s strengthening.
- iv. But what does this mean to establish your ways before the Lord? Well, for Jotham it meant that success did not derail his commitment to viewing life through how all things relate to Yahweh God. His father had allowed success to go to his head. He had grown proud as though somehow his success was a product of his own greatness. This prideful view of success led him to act in a terribly foolish way that provoked the righteous anger of the Lord that sidelined him for the rest of his existence. Jotham saw all of this and in his success he was determined to remember that his success was from the Lord and not

from God. It also means that when he considered going to build another tower or conquer another enemy threat or participate in the Temple worship, he considered Yahweh God. He considered how God viewed what he was doing and he then acted accordingly. He was not a double minded man whom James reminds us is unstable in all of his ways, but he was singularly minded in ordering his steps before the Lord. And in this he strengthened himself as he enjoyed the blessing of God upon his obedience.

- v. Now, this is not some ATM type theology where you put in the debit card of your good works and out comes the cash of God's blessing. Rather, the universal principle we see on display in Jotham's life is simply that God's way works. When man orders his ways before the Lord and does things according to God's truth he finds that God actually knew what he was talking about when he told us that life works best His way. And so in Psalm 1 we read:
 1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Ps. 1:1-3 ESV)
 2. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! ² Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, ³ who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! (Psa 119:1-3 ESV)
- vi. The psalmists acknowledge that God's ways bring the Shalom type blessing of God upon a human life. There is not better life to be lived than the one that is lived according to God's ways. Now, knowing that and living that are two different things. It is not enough for me to know that God's ways are best, I must also have a changed heart that will want God's ways rather than my own way.
- vii. This is only possible through the grace offered in Jesus Christ. You can only have a changed heart through Jesus. Apart from Jesus Christ you will never sustain a life that is ordered according to the ways of the Lord. Our rebellious hearts will never choose God's ways unless our rebellious hearts are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ through faith in His finished work for us on the Cross of Calvary. But a redeemed heart does not guarantee a life lived according to the ways of the Lord – it simply makes it possible and provides all the motivation necessary.
- viii. So, just because you have been redeemed by Jesus' blood shed for you does not mean that now you all of a sudden robotically operate according to all the ways of God. Rather, those of us who are in Christ through faith – who know the forgiveness of our sins and the new and eternal life through the new birth – we *can* now walk in the ways of the Lord. We are now able to because our sins have been forgiven and the power of sin has been overcome by the precious blood of Christ. This gloriously freeing Gospel provides the ability for us to walk in all of the ways of the Lord. But it also provides for us all of the motivation to walk in all of the ways of the Lord too. So, not only am I able to because of Christ's work on my behalf, but the more I consider the reality of what Christ has done for me the more motivated I am by His grace to actually want to walk in all of His ways. The apostle Paul put it like this:
 1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which* is your reasonable

service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Rom 12:1-2 KJV)

2. In 11 chapters Paul has made clear the glorious depths of the Gospel, and here he calls us to our only logical response. We must lay down our lives on the altar before God never to pick it up again – realizing that it has been purchased with the high price of Christ's blood and so therefore it is rightly God's life and not mine. We must reject the molded worldview of those around us who do not know God, and we must be transformed from the inside out by the renewing of our minds so that we can test and experience in the context of real life what the will of God is. And in so doing Paul is convinced that we will find this will of God to be good and acceptable and complete. In other words – we will really like what God has for us if we will order our lives according to His ways. Sounds like Jotham's life here! Yet it is filled with Gospel grace. We can walk in God's ways and order our steps according to His will because we have been given a new heart through faith in Jesus Christ. We can and we must consider this grace that has been given and in response we must lay down our wills and our ways and we must be transformed by God's grace. And in so doing we will find that our ways our strengthened as we walk in God's perfect, acceptable, and good way! This is the truly blessed life – the one that is enabled by the Gospel and is compelled by the Gospel to order its steps according to God's ways.
3. Brother or sister, if you have no desire to walk according to God's ways it is because you do not understand or have not recently considered the depths of the Gospel. If you do not have the motivation to deny the flesh and be filled with the Spirit – if you do not have the discipline to say no to your worldly lusts and be transformed by the renewing of your mind – if you do not have the gusto in your sails to search out your life so as to order all things according to God's ways – the problem is not with God or His ways or His theology! The problem is with your understanding of and application of the Gospel to real life. You do not need a motivational speaker and a pull yourself up by the bootstraps kind of moment – you need more of the Gospel. You don't need to be beaten with the commands, you need to be showered with the truth so as to wash away the filth of self-effort and self-exaltation. You need the wondrous reality that apart from Jesus you can't keep the Lord's ways, but in Christ Jesus you can't help but walk moment by moment as a living sacrifice totally dominated by His will for His glory! There is no better way, and we see a glimpse of that in our text this morning. Jotham points us to this glorious reality – whether in success or distress we must seek our help from the Lord.

II. In Distress Ahaz Sought Human Help

- a. Jotham is contrasted in the text with Ahaz, his own son. While Jotham sought the Lord, even in his success – his son, Ahaz, did not ever seek the Lord, even in his distress. We are told right away that he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but rather he chose to walk in the ways of the Kings of Israel. So, though he inherited the great success of his father and saw firsthand the product of a life lived in humble obedience to the Lord – he rejected all of this and chose to walk in the ways of the Northern kings. And he did not just dally here or there with the

idolatry that dominated the landscape of the Northern Kingdom – no, he brought it all. He made metal images for the Baals and he even decided to go beyond the idolatry of his relatives by worshiping in pagan rituals as vile as offering his sons as burnt sacrifices in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. These vile practices bring the people full circle, as it says in verse 3. They had been brought to the Promised Land when the iniquity of the Amorites was full before God because of their vile practices, and now Ahaz has returned to those very practices! But that is not all! He also sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree, as it says in verse 4. Religion and worship were sure important to him, but just not to the right God.

- b. As you can imagine, this vileness of false worship provoked the Lord to anger and guaranteed his swift hand of judgment upon his covenant people. This came in the form of a joint attack by Rezin, the King of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel. And God made sure of Judah's defeat. Rezin and Pekah defeated Ahaz and Judah in spectacular fashion and both of them carried off a great number of captives. The text explicitly focuses on Israel's defeat of Judah in which many are killed including several key officials. Then in verse 8 we read of many captives and much spoil being taken to Samaria where God intervenes with the voice of a prophet. This prophet sent by God tells the men of Israel that God was angry with Judah and so he sent Israel to defeat them and bring his punishment upon them. But Israel went with such a rage that the stench of that rage wafted to Heaven and now God is angry with Israel because of their excessively vile treatment of their own relatives. So, God knew that they were taking these captives because they intended to enslave them, and God intervenes through Oded and tells them that they must not do this. And amazingly, 4 men stood up in courageous zeal to lead the way to obeying the voice of the Lord. They demanded the return of all of the captives and they themselves oversaw the operation. Even in Samaria God can provide mercy for His own. You would think that this fresh outpouring of mercy from God would cause Ahaz to rejoice in Yahweh God, reject his vile practices, and return to the one true God – you would think! But rather, right after Judah was being attacked by Israel and Syria, the text tells us in verse 17 that it was also being attacked the Edomites and the Philistines. So, Judah is getting it from all sides. The Israelites and Syrians from the North, the Philistines from the West, and the Edomites from the South and East. There wasn't a pressure point missed here. Judah was in all out desperation mode. God had sent all the enemies that surrounded the land.
- c. So, let's pretend you are one of Ahaz's military advisors. What would you tell him here? What is the obvious way in the text to assuage the attack of the enemy? Is it not, as God's covenant people, to repent of all idolatrous practices and seek the Lord in every way? Is this not one clear function of the ruin and captivity that God is sending – to turn the hearts of his people back to Him? And yet, verse 16 points us to a different reality. Rather than turn to the one true God for help, Ahaz depends upon human intuition and ingenuity and calls upon the king of Assyria for help. The parallel passage to this one in 2 Kings 16 tells us that this move brought temporary relief at a hefty price. We learn there that Tiglath-Pileser, the mighty warrior-king of Assyria did indeed come and attacked Syria and this attack brought some relief to Judah, but it did not bring ultimate victory and success. In fact, in verse 20 of our text we are told that Tiglath-Pileser came, but that instead of helping he actually distressed and afflicted Ahaz all the more by demanding a hefty tribute.
- d. And yet, what is Ahaz's response to all of this? "In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord." Back in verse 19 we get a behind the scenes look at why this is all happening to Judah. The Lord is humbling Judah because she refuses to humble herself. Ahaz

has caused Judah to sin a great sin and be very unfaithful to the Lord, and so the Lord has sent enemies on all sides to attack the land and humble the people. You see the central issue here is pride. Ahaz has led the people to thumb their nose at God and go their own way and worship in the most heathen of practices. In the face of affliction and distress, Ahaz has led them to seek help from human strength. They don't want Yahweh God, and they don't think they need Him.

- e. Turn with me back to chapter 7. These verses are often misquoted and misapplied in relationship to America today, but in their original context God gave His covenant people a warning and a promise. Let's read verses 11-14. God's promise to hear from Heaven the cries of his distressed people are given in the context of the lack of rain and pestilence that will come upon His people if they forget Him and go their own way. He sends the distress as a means to draw His people to humility. And so, back in our text in chapter 28, verse 19 makes it clear that if the people would not humble themselves and seek Him for healing and help, he would continue to humble them himself. And so he does!
- f. But it continues to get worse. In response to all of this distress that was sent by God to turn the heart of the king towards Him, Ahaz becomes all the more faithless to God. He takes the gods of Damascus and sacrifices to them and seeks their help. In 2 Kings 16 we read of how he basically replaced the worship of Yahweh God at the Temple with the Syrian worship that he was exposed to in Damascus when he went up to meet Tiglath-Pileser. The very work of God sent to humble the people of Israel, only emboldened their leader to continue on in his vile acts of seeking help from every god but the one true God. And the text is clear – it ruined him!

g. *And was Ruined*

- i. This is the result of seeking help outside of God in the midst of our distress – ruin! This is where human ingenuity and human practices get us in the face of our difficult and distressing moments of life. When we act like Ahaz and seek help outside of God we destine ourselves to ruin and destruction. Now, to be clear, there was a period in which it seemed as though that outside help was working for Ahaz. There was a stretch where Tiglath-Pileser did indeed fend off Syria and Israel and some of the distress was apparently removed from Judah. But this façade of success through seeking help outside of God only brought the destruction and the ruin in more deceptive ways. This is the scary thing about seeking help outside of God in the midst of our distress – it can seem to work and therefore it can deceive us into pursuing it all the more because it appears as though it is working.
- ii. Now, it would be very easy to read this text and listen to this sermon and be appalled by Ahaz's treachery against the Lord, but be relatively unchanged by it. So, don't miss the message to your soul here. Where do you turn in the midst of distress? Where do you run and who do you call? In those moments of intense distress how are you prone to call upon human help? Maybe you find satisfaction in food when you should seek help from God. Maybe you escape the pressures of this world through entertainment rather than deal with the difficult realities of life in a sin-cursed world. Maybe you look to the advice of a friend or confidant to help you deal with the frustrations of life. These may all seem to provide help in the short term. They may seem to present a façade of help, but in the long term they will lead to your ruin.
- iii. There have been several marriage counseling cases throughout my years of pastoral ministry where this seemed to be the heart of the issue, but one in particular fit this bill. The wife felt unloved and underappreciated. The husband was convinced he was nothing more than a meal ticket and a fatherly figure for the kids. There was constant stress in

the home and this distress propelled the husband to look for help. Unfortunately, he looked for help by re-connecting with an old girlfriend on Facebook because in his mind she was one of the only people who ever truly understood him. He got help from her indeed. His communication with her increased more and more as things got worse and worse in the home. But his stress at home was relieved by his extra-marital relationship with this woman. But this temporary relief was but a façade of success and eventually the marriage was marred by an adulterous affair that only emboldened the husband in his desire to get out of the marriage. When confronted with God's answers, and even his wife's patient forgiveness and commitment to work on marriage God's way, he refused to admit his wrongs and humble himself before God. And today, his marriage is ruined and his life is filled with struggles and difficulties at every turn. You see, seeking help outside of God only appears to actually help, but in the long run it will ruin you.

- iv. And so, in your success, or in your distress – I plead with you this morning Christian, that you seek your help from the Lord. Order your steps before Him because by the grace provided through the Cross of Christ you are both able to do this and compelled to do this.

Conclusion: I want to close this morning by pointing you to the fact that Jotham was responsible for Jotham and Ahaz was responsible for Ahaz and the people of Judah were responsible for the people of Judah. In other words, not one of the individual people in our text this morning were destined to spiritual success or spiritual failure because of the successes or sins of others who had gone before them. Jotham saw the spiritual failure of his father Uzziah, but he did not follow that path. Rather he chose to order all of his steps before the Lord. Ahaz saw the great success of his father Jotham and yet he chose to go his own way and worship anything and anywhere. Under Jotham's leadership the people still did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Under Ahaz's leadership the people were encouraged by his idolatry to continue on in their own idolatry. But Jotham is not held responsible by God for what Ahaz did and Ahaz cannot ride on the laurels of his father. This is well expressed by Ezekiel the prophet in chapter 18 where he addressing the iniquity of the nation of Israel as a whole and of the individual responsibility within it. He says:

¹⁴ "Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise: ¹⁵ he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, ¹⁶ does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, ¹⁷ withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or profit, obeys my rules, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. ¹⁸ As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity. ¹⁹ "Yet you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. ²⁰ The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Eze 18:14-20 ESV)

How encouraging this message is to those who descend from idol worshipers! How freeing this is for those who follow in the genetic footsteps of people who sought their help from every source but the one true God of Heaven. There may be continuing consequence upon the nation as a whole for the sins of the nation, as there will be for Judah – but each individual is responsible before God to seek Him. You are not destined to spiritual failure by those who have gone before you. You do not have to continue on in the cyclical nature of sin. By God's gracious work through the cleansing and sanctifying power of the Gospel you can walk in humble dependence

upon God and you can please Him with your life that is rightly ordered before Him – a life that tests and experiences the will of God and finds it to be good and acceptable and perfect. The question is not can you do this, but will you do this? Christ has taken care of the can, and he has provided the heart changing motivation to rightly shape the will. So, believer, will you gaze this morning upon the redemption of your soul through the finished work of Jesus and be compelled to not rest upon your spiritual successes or be downtrodden by yours or others spiritual failures, and will you press on in Gospel grace to seek the Lord – whether in success or in distress? Let's pray!