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by C H Spurgeon

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2 Chronicles 27:6 Jotham's Peculiar Honor

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“So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” — 2 Chronicles 27:6.

THIS is a very singular expression which is used here concerning Jotham, who is one of the kings of Judah who are commended as having done that which was right in the sight of the Lord. All of them had their faults, yet they were the best monarchs that sat upon the throne of Judah; and concerning Jotham it is mentioned as his peculiar honor that he “became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.”

I want to draw your attention to this ancient king, and specially to point out to you, first, the peculiar circumstances of Jotham's life; secondly, the peculiar distinction of his character; and then, thirdly, the peculiar honor of his career. He “became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.”

I. So let us commence by considering The Peculiar Circumstances Of Jotham's Life.

And, to begin with, he was the son of a good father, and I should suppose, from the mention of his mother here, of a good mother too. This is a good beginning for a young man; and yet, mark you, there are many who have been trained in the ways of godliness who have not continued to walk in them. How often does it seem as if children were dead set against the very things which their parents have loved; and although one would almost have expected that they would have gone in the right way, yet, since grace does not run in the blood, we have deplorable proofs of human depravity even in those who can trace a long line of Christian ancestry. However, it was no small advantage to Jotham that, he had godly parents; but it would have been no permanent and eternal advantage to him, — it would rather have involved him in greater responsibility without corresponding benefits, if it could not also have been said of him that “he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.”

And note, next, that he did not commit the great fault of his father Uzziah. Uzziah was a good man, an excellent man in many respects; but, in his latter days, he conceived the idea that he would be a priest as well as a king, and he therefore thrust himself

into the place that was meant for the priests only. The priests, in great alarm, hastened into the temple of the Lord, where he had gone to burn incense upon the altar of incense and vehemently protested against his intrusion into their holy office. He was very angry with them; but, suddenly, the deadly leprosy was white upon his brow, for God had smitten him for his daring intrusion; and the priests thrust him out of the temple that he might no longer pollute the sanctuary of the Lord; "yea," we read, "himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him." Now, if a father — and, specially, a professedly godly father — has committed a great fault, it may be a temptation to his son to fall into the same evil; but, in the case of Jotham, it was not so. He regarded his father's sin rather as a beacon to warn him away from that rock on which Uzziah's life had been wrecked; so, when he was put upon the throne as regent for his father, and Uzziah had been shut up in a house apart as a leper who could not be allowed to mingle with his family and his subjects, Jotham took that as a daily lesson to himself, and he walked the more carefully and humbly before God, preparing his ways, as his father Uzziah had not done on that unfortunate, unhappy day when he went into the temple to offer incense. It is a great mercy for us, when we have seen others sin, if we use their shipwrecks as beacons for ourselves. What fascination should there be in sin? When one bird sees another fall into a snare, we wonder that it should be so foolish as to fall into the snare that it can see; yet have we known men, who have seen the sins of their parents, and the sorrow consequent thereon, who have fallen into the same sins themselves. Dear Christian young people, if God has called you by his grace, and you have had professing Christian friends, whose imperfections you could not help seeing, and seeing with sorrow also the evil effects of their wrong-doing do not run into the same courses yourselves, but let the painful circumstances which have happened in your own family lead you the more carefully, like Jotham, to prepare your ways before the Lord your God.

Jotham also was quite a young man when he came into a position of power. For some years, he occupied the place of his father, nominally holding the position of regent, yet really acting as the actual monarch; and now, at the age of twenty-five, we find him sitting upon the throne of Judah. How needful it is, in young people especially, that the heart and the ways should be prepared before the Lord their God! Yet I retract the expression that it is "especially" needful for young people to do this, for I have lived long enough to observe that the greatest faults that are ever committed by professedly Christian men are not committed by young people. Most painful is it, to me to remember that the worst cases of backsliding and apostasy that I have ever seen, in this church, have been by old men and middle-aged men, — not by young people; for, somehow or other, the young people, if they are truly taught of God, know their weakness, and so they cry to God for help; but it often happens that more experienced people begin to think that they are not likely to fall into the faults and follies of the young; and I care not how old a man may be — even if seven centuries had passed over his head, — if he began to trust in himself, he would be a fool, and soon he would have a grievous fall. Yea, even if he had lived as long as Methuselah, and all that while had been advancing in the divine life, so that he could even fancy that he had reached perfection, the moment he thought so he would be in imminent danger; and the instant he began to think that he should never fall, he would be the very one, above all other men, who would be likely to fall into sin. They are the strongest who are the weakest in themselves. They are the richest who know how poor they are apart from God. They have the most grace who know how utterly empty they would be of grace if the Lord should ever stay his hand from giving it to them. Growing Christians think nothing of themselves, but full-grown Christians know themselves to be less than nothing. Notwithstanding that there are peculiar dangers associated with youth, and especially with youth placed in a prominent position, here was an instance of a young man and a king, and yet, for all that a saint of the right kind, one who "prepared his ways before the Lord his God." It must be a hard matter to be a king and to be a saint at the same time. The combination has very seldom occurred; and when it has, it has been a prodigious triumph of grace of young man, if God shall put you into a place of great responsibility, where you will need much grace to keep you from falling, ask him for the needful grace, and he will give it to you. Do not ask for an eminent position; let your prayer rather be, "Lead me not, into temptation." An eminent position always has a measure of temptation connected with it, so you are justified in praying to be preserved from it. Still, if the position be one which it is your duty to take, take it, and trust to God's grace to keep you there in safety. You are just as safe if God has put you on the cross of St. Paul's as you would be on the pavement below, — quite as secure on the top of a mast as you would be in the cabin of the vessel, if God, in his providence, has called you to occupy that position. Only, since there is, in itself, a great danger in the lofty pinnacle, you have the more reason to ask for the needful grace that you may carefully prepare your ways before the Lord, so that you may not bring the greater dishonor upon his name because of the prominence of the position you are called to occupy. King Jotham was a young man, and a great man; yet, for all that, he was a saintly man.

Remember also, that he lived in very evil times. The second verse of this chapter tells us that his own people, whom he had to govern, "did yet corruptly;" and the parallel passage, in 2 Kings 15:35, says that they "sacrificed and burnt incense still in the high places." Their king's good example was not sufficient to reclaim them from the iniquities in which they had so long indulged. It was a great thing for the nation to have a king who worshipped Jehovah, but it was a sad thing that the people still continued to practice their idolatrous rites in the high places, which they were forbidden to do. It is not an easy thing for a man — even a king — to live above his surroundings, and all men are more or less the creatures of circumstances. They are influenced for good or evil by the people round about them; and the most of them fashion their consciences according to the consciences of other people with whom they come in contact. Even down to a few years ago, there were undoubtedly good men, in America, who did not think it wrong to buy, and sell, and hold slaves; the general conscience of the people around them was only up to that level, and their own

conscience was not sufficiently enlightened to lift them above their surroundings. They did not see that no man has a right to the labors of another man without adequate payment, and that every man has a right to his own liberty. Their conscience had not more light than there was in those who lived round about them. When a man lives in a feverish district, he must have a good sound constitution, and be in vigorous health, if he is not to feel some, of the evil influence by which he is surrounded; for, if he does not actually take the fever, there is a feverishness, a lethargy, and a condition of malaise about him, which he would, not have felt if he had been in a more healthful and bracing atmosphere. Yet Jotham appears to have been, through divine grace, a man full of spiritual health, although he lived in a land that was spiritually fever-stricken. He dwelt in the midst of people who wore corrupt, and yet was himself uncorrupted, "because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." Some of you, young people, do not know much about this experience, because you live, as it were, in a hothouse, with Christian parents, and with the means of grace all around you. You are like plants in a conservatory; you ought to grow fast. But, there are others here, who know what the chilly atmosphere of the world means, and who know only too well that, after they have been communing with God, a little while,, within these walls, they will have to go where they will hear the voice of blasphemy and profanity, and see a thousand things which grieve their spirits day by day, and hour by hour. If that is the case. with you, my friends, you ought, above all ethos-s, to prepare your ways before the Lord your God. I charge you, my brethren,, if your occupation takes you among ungodly men, — and there are some lawful occupations that will call us where we shall certainly meet, with little or nothing that will help us, but much that will hinder us, — you must be careful, above all men, to keep a diligent watch upon. yourselves, and to prepare your ways before the Lord your God. Your Lord does not pray the Father to take you out of the world, but, he does pray that he will keep you from, the evil that is in the world; and in accordance with his prayer, it ought to be the great aim of your life that you may so live as not to be dragged down to the low level of ungodly men, — ay, and not even down to the level of common Christianity; for the level of ordinary Christianity, at this day, far too closely resembles that of the church in Laodicea,, which was go nauseous to the Lord. May you, beloved, be a people separated unto God, to walk in holiness before him, and to adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things! But if it is to be so with those of you who are placed in, circumstances similar to those of Jotham, .king of Judah, you must do as he did, you must prep your ways ,before the Lord your God.

Once more, as Jotham's surroundings at home were bad, so they were a little further afield, for the adjoining kingdom of Israel was utterly polluted with idolatry, and all manner of evil; and Jotham was obliged, more or less, to feel the influence of that ungodly neighboring nation. Wherever he looked, he saw very few who prepared their ways before God. Every man went his own way, and sought his own wealth or pleasure, and oppressed the people around him; but Jotham, like —

"the seraph Abdiel, faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful only he," —

prepared his ways before the Lord his God." Oh, that such grace as that might be found in abundance in all Christians now, that they might seek to walk in the right road in God's name, — not running with the multitude to do, evil, but choosing the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life eternal with strong resolve determining, the Holy Ghost dwelling in them, that, let, others do as they will, as for then and their house, they will serve the Lord, and their ways shall be prepared before him.

While there were so many unfavorable circumstances that might have been a hindrance to Jotham, there was one fact that must have been very helpful to him. There were some notable prophets living in Judah in his day. Isaiah, Hoses, and Micah must all have been well known to Jotham; Isaiah wrote the biography of his father Uzziah, for it is said, in the chapter before that from which our text is taken, "Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last., did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write." Jotham therefore knew Isaiah, and I should not wonder if it was one of the greatest helps to the growth of his spiritual life to, be able to talk with such a mass, so full of light and love, with such, a clear foresight of the coming of Christ, and such far-reaching visions of the glory of the blessed gospel day. I should not wonder if Jotham often gob away front the people, and got away from the court., and talked alone with this holy man of God. If he did, it was the natural means which God generally uses for the strengthening of his people. You will be wise,, you young Christian professors, if you cultivate Christian companionship. Try to live with those who live with God, and sit at the feet of these who sit at the feet of Christ.. God may speak through them to your soul; so give heed to what they say, it. may be that, in giving heed to them., you will be listening to the voice of God himself. If God does not lack a men — get to deliver his message, let not the messenger lack a hearer to receive the message. Rest assured that you will be most likely to grow in grace when you are earnestly and zealously attending upon the ministry of the Word. The messages of the Lord's chosen prophets probably greatly strengthened the good resolutions and the deep* seated principles of Jotham, and so helped him to prepare his ways before the Lord his Clod.

This must suffice concerning Jotham's circumstances; they are certainly instructive and suggestive to us.

II. Now, secondly', we are to consider The Peculiar Distinction Of Jotham's Character. It is said that "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." What does that sentence mean?

Certainly it means, first, that he resolved to do what God bade him. He made God's law, God's will, to be the rule that was to govern his life. He desired that what he did should be right in the, sight of the Lord. He did not trouble about being thought to be right by neighboring king;, nor was it his chief care to be thought to be right by the people over whom he ruled. He was not ambitious to be regarded as right by the heathers nations that were near him, but he did want to be right, in the sight of God. He had selected, as the rule by which he was to regulate his conduct, God's standard of right,, and equity, and truth, and righteousness. Jotham recognized Jehovah as being his God, and he understood that he was bound to obey God, — that the first object, of his life, ought to be to please him who first gave him life, and who had: continued to mists, in him in life,. It is a grand thing where a man comes to this decision, — that the rule of his life shall be the will of God, — that, from that day forward, God the Holy Ghost, working in him, to will and to. do according to God's good pleasure, he will judge that to be right which God commands and that to be wrong which, God forbids, and that all other rules shall only be rules to him in proportion as they keep in a line with this rule; and that, whatever else may be the guide of others, though it may be a matter of custom, or prescription, or law, or example of the highest kind, he will not yield to it.

The worst of it is that there are so many who have a number of petty masters whom they try to serve. One says, "I would not do anything that is not customary to people in my position." Another says, (and this is a great thing with the most of men) should not, like to be regarded as singular or unfashionable." Another asks, "What: would society say?" — that wonderful tyrant of these latter days. Yet another says, "But my father always did as I am doing," thus putting his father in, the place that ought, to be occupied by his God. Another says, "But., year know, my Practice is in accordance with the Council of such-and-such a Church;" or, "it is in accordance with the decisions of such-and-such & Synod;" — as if Councils, or Synods, or anything else had any right to rule over us, except in so far as their regulations are in harmony with the will of the Lord our God. It is grand to feel that you are free, front all these fetters, and that, you can say, "O Lord, I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds, and no earthly or hellish power can now make my spirit bow down before it. Thy will commands me, but no other will does. My knee bows before thine omnipotent majesty. With awe and reverence I worship thee, and desire to, be subservient in all things to thy great behests, O Jehovah; but as for these thy creatures, what. are' they that should fear them? Who are they, — like the moths that swiftly pass away, and the worms that soon perish — that I should tremble at their frown, or court their smile?" God, said God alone, should be the Christian's master; and the rule of his conduct should be the will of the Lord alone as revealed in the teaching of this blessed Book. Happy will Christians be, and strong in the Lord will they become, when. they get as far as that.

But that is not, all; that is only the beginning. Jotham had set up the true standard; he desired to do what was right in the sight of the Lord. But the :next thing was that he realized God's presence, and so acted like a man who was living consciously in, God's presence. According to .the text,, he "prepared his ways before the Lord his God." Beloved, do. you and I always realize God's presence in this way? Suppose that, at this very moment, it flashed upon your mind that God was looking into your heart,, could you say that you are loving and thinking of such things as you would be glad to be loving and thinking of, while you were conscious that God was looking upon you.? Where have you been to-day? It is not my place to answer the question for you. Where have you been to-day? Have you been in such places that you would be, glad for God to see you there? Have you been in stroh a frame of mind that you would be glad fro' God to see you in that frame of mind? Have you spoken to others in just that spirit, and tone that you would like God to hear? He did hear it,, remember; he,. was there; but would you have done as you have done had you been fully conscious, as you ought, to have been, that God was there? You know that you sometimes do things that you would not like other to see you doing; and you are startled when somebody finds you so acting. But should it be so? Should it be so? Of course, I do not mean that. any of the ordinary work that any of us are doing is of that. character; the work that we are doing about the house or in our business should not be a cause of shame to us. I suddenly came upon one of our friends, the or. her day, just as she was whiten-ing the front steps. "Oh, dear!" she said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I am sorry you caught me doing this." "My good woman," I said, "I hope that, when the Lord comes, he will find me, at work about my proper duties, just, as I have found you. Never mind about your hands; they are as good to shake as ever they were. Let us go into the house, and have a little talk together." There is nothing to be ashamed of or to blush at in such. work as that; but, I should be ashamed, and expect others to, blush if I found them cheating, or doing wrong in some other way, or idling their time away, as some do. Ought, we not to live as though we were expecting the Lord Jesus Christ to come any minute, or as if we knew, as we do know, that God sees us, and knows all about us, every moment?

But that is not all that we gather concerning Jotham's character. He had accepted the right standard, and he had set that standard in the right light,; but new he went, further still, for he was thoughtfully and carefully considerate. I think that is the gist of the meaning of the expression, "He prepared his ways before the Lord his God." That is to say, he did not go and live in what I may call a careless, happy-go-lucky, hit-or-miss, neck-or-nothing, over-head-and-heels kind of way of living, as some people do. They rush with desperate haste rate the battle of life, and never seem to give time for thought .as to due preparation for the great combat. When any good impulse is upon them, away they go, in the right direction, at such a speed that you would think they were very eminent and zealous saints; but perhaps to-morrow there will be an evil impulse upon theta, and they will go just as fast in the waxing direction. They are so easily influenced by outside circumstances that they are turned either way by those who have power over them, and they are as thoughtless for good as they are for evil. They are heed leas and reckless, — fine enthusiastic people

in their way, but. they lack solidity, they are without permanent principles. Like Reuben, .being unstable as water, they shall not excel. If a tailor is about to make a suit of clothes, he looks carefully at the cloth before he begins to cut it; but there are some people, who seem to use the scissors without any thought at all; they cut out their life-garment at a peradventure. When a man goes into a, certain trade, if he hopes to do business, he lays out his plans with considerable forethought, and considers his projects with all proper care. If he is to be a successful man of business, he must, exercise forethought; and, in the Christian life, we also need much, forethought. There ought to be a mapping out, of the day, a, mapping out of the year, in fact, a mapping out, of life itself, and a serious thinking over every part of it. We should often do much better if we did nothing at all. We should frequently make most progress if we stood quite still. Our common proverb is quite correct, "The more haste,, the worse speed." It would be a wise plan for each one of us to pause a while, .to put the hand to the brow, and then to ask, "Lord, let. me hear a voice behind me saying, 'This is the way; walk thou in it.'"

We need to be led where the path seems most plain. Did not the children of Israel make a great mistake in the case of the Gibeonites, because it seemed very clear that they must have come from a far country? We generally make our worst mistakes in matters which appear to us to be so plain, that we think we do not, need direction from God concerning them.. If we waited upon God in what, we regarded as plain and simple matters, if we made that our rule with regard to them, 'we should be more likely to go right, in the more difficult matters. It would be something like the old proverb, "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves." I mean that, if we always took our simplicities to God, we should be quite sure to take our difficulties to him... I suppose Jotham used, when he was considering a certain course of action, to consider whether he could glorify God by that course of action; and if he thought, he could not,, he would not take it; and when there was proposed to him any mode of doing a certain thing which had to be done, he looked carefully to see whether it. was God's mode; and if it was not, he would not adopt that mode of doing even the right thing, but; would do the right thing in the right way.

But I think there is even more meaning than this in our text. In order to accomplish this preparation of his ways before, the Lord his God, Jotham must have been a man of prayer. He could not have prepared his ways thus anywhere except at the mercy-seat. He must have been in the habit of taking his daily troubles to his God, and of seeking guidance from him in his daily difficulties, and of blessing him for his daily mercies. He must have been in constant communion with his God, or else he could not have ordered his ways aright before him.

And I should also gather, from our text, that Jotham was a very fearless, calm, collected, quiet-spirited man, who was not easily moved, for I find that the marginal reading is, "He established his ways before the Lord his God." He was not fickle-minded, carried about by every wind time blew; but having prepared his heart to. serve the Lord, God was pleased to give him a fixity of heart., so that he was established in the right way. He could say, with David, "My heart, is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed;" and the, marginal reading thence is "prepared." " My heart is prepared, O God." Jotham was steadfast, in the right, way. What a grand thing it. is, in our daily life,, not to be so worried that we are almost driven to distraction, and caused to do foolish things through unwise haste; and what, a mercy it is to be kept, calm and quiet in our daily walk before the Lord our God! O dear friends, seek to be thus established before the Lord; that, whatever happens to you, your heart shall be so fixed that you shall not be afraid of evil tidings! You can never have power to move the world unless you have a fixed fulcrum for your lever; but if your heart is fixed on God, you will be able to move, the world, but the world will not be able, to move, you.

The real reason why Jotham's heart was prepared and established before God was because his heart was right with God. And how did his heart get to. be right with God? Why, in the same way as yours and mine must, — by being created anew. The heart of man, by nature, whether it is Jotham's heart or anybody else's, is a heart of stone; and God's almighty grace must make it a heart of flesh, or else a heart of stone it always will remain. If there be anything good in any man, it must have been placed there by a supernatural work of God the Holy Spirit. Job rightly said, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Who can bring fixity of heart, out of an, unstable heart like ours? Who can bring the preparation of our ways before God out of a heart that is, by nature, deceitful above, all things, and desperately wicked? Jotham earned the, commendation in our text because he had been the subject of sovereign grace, and continued as, ill to be so; and if you and I think that we can prepare our ways before the Lord our God without first resorting to the precious blood of Christ for cleansing, and to the Holy Ghost for the renewal of our nature, we shall make a very great mistake. The Lord must first work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, and then we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; but, not till he has thus worked in us can we work it out.

III. Now, thirdly, we are to notice The Peculiar Honor Of Jotham's Career: "So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God."

I should imagine, first, that he was mighty in resolve. It is a grand thing to have a man of resolves, who has a high purpose before him, and who means to accomplish it. That is the only man who is worthy to be called a man. As for that poor creature who looks like a man, but who has not any mind or will of his own, who has his ear pulled, first this way, and then that way, whoever likes to

pull it, — what is the use of such a creature on the face of the earth? But Jotham was not a man of that kind; he sought counsel of the Lord, to know what he ought to do; he judged honestly and carefully, in the sight of God, what was the right thing for him to do; and when he found that out, he put his foot down, and said, "That is the thing that I am going to do." It was no use for any of his subjects to say to him, "But perhaps that is not a prudent thing for you to do." He believed that to be right, is to be truly prudent. [It was no use for any of them to say to Jotham, "But this course of yours may involve us as well as you in serious trouble." He knew perfectly well that, if right sometimes brings trouble, wrong always brings ten times as much; and whenever doing right does bring trouble, it ought to be the delight, of the right-hearted to endure that trouble cheerfully. Jotham was strong in resolution, as a man has a right to be when he knows that his resolution is a right one; and that man, who has prepared his heart and his ways, with a single eye to God's glory, resolving only to do the right thing whatever may happen, is the man who has a right to say, "I will." and "I shall;" and he is the man who, in the long run, will be respected by his fellow-men.

Having ordered his ways before the Lord his God, Jotham had another sort of strength, which is a very valuable one, — he was mighty in faith. He felt this, "I have sincerely desired to glorify God, and to walk in his ways, and I am sure that God will carry me through." When he felt that it was right for him to fight the king of the Ammonites, he did fight him in no half-hearted manner, because he felt that, if God had bidden him fight, God would surely give him the victory. He went to all his work relying upon God; and oh, how strong is the man who is mighty in faith! You know that you cannot have faith in God about a thing that you know is wrong. If you have ever so slight a suspicion that you are in the wrong, you cannot trust in concerning it. It is like a little stone in your boot; it may not kill you, but you cannot walk with comfort as long as it is there. And a little question — even a very little one — as to whether you are in the right, cuts the sinews of your strength, and you go limping along, even if you can go at all. If I were speaking to you as a member of a church in which I did not quite believe, if I had to twist my message so as to make it fit the creed that I professed to hold, I should feel wretched. I would not get into such a position as that; I would sooner break stones upon the road any day. But where I feel that I have satisfied the requirements of my conscience in all points, and that, if I do err, I do not err wilfully, or with my eyes open about it, then I can speak with confidence, and say, "I know that this is right, and that God will help me through with it. It does not at all matter to me, what it involves. If it should bring me to poverty or suffering, or draw down upon my head misrepresentation and contempt, it does not matter at all. Wisdom will be justified of all her children. God never did forsake the right yet, and he never will; it must conquer in the long run." If the follower of the right and the true should have to suffer, it shall be a joy to him; for he will thus be all the more a follower of his Lord and Master, and of all the true servants of his God who have gone before.

As Jotham was a mighty man in resolution and in faith, he also became mighty in prayer. You know that you cannot pray to God with power about a thing that you are not certain is right. It is no use for me to ask the Lord to help me in a matter in which there is something that will grieve his Holy Spirit; it must be a case that I can confidently bring before God if I am to secure his help in it. I am sure that some tradespeople could not show the Lord their books; and if they cannot do so, and they are getting into difficulties, who can help them out of them? But when all is straight and honest, and the loss, whatever it may be, is caused by no fault of theirs, or when the accusation that is brought against them is nothing but slander, then they can present their petition to God with a clear conscience, and they may rest assured that he will hear them, and grant their requests. A man becomes mighty in prayer, as well as in resolution and in faith, whose ways are prepared before the Lord his God.

And such a man also becomes mighty in action. He has not that guilty conscience which is the very essence of cowardice. He has gone before God as a sinner, and confessed his guilt; and he has been washed in the precious Blood of Jesus, and cleansed from every stain. His heart has been renewed by the Holy Ghost; and although he is not yet perfect, he is perfect in his intention to do the Lord's will; and feeling that he is right, and that what he is doing is at God's bidding, he is a terrible man to oppose. He is such a man that no other shall be able to stand against him all the days of his life. He is of that seed royal that Haman will in vain seek to slay, for Haman will be hanged upon the gallows, but Mordecai will be in power in the palace. If a man has thus prepared his ways before the Lord his God, he will be mighty in all that he does, and God will be with him.

And this, dear friends, will make him mighty against his foes, as Jotham was against the Ammonites. Oftentimes, they will not even dare to attack him; for "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." They will watch him, and go round about him, as Satan went round about Job, but they will find scarcely anything that they can truthfully say against him. Or if they do oppose him, it will be of no use, for he will live them down, if he does not overcome them in any other way. If they bark at him, he will let them bark, for he knows it is the nature of dogs to do so; and he will go on his way all the same, as the moon does when the dogs bark at her at night. She nearer pauses in her course, but goes shining on her way still.

If a man's ways are prepared before the Lord his God, he will be mighty not only against his foes, but he will also be mighty in the midst of his own people. Even though Jotham's subjects would not follow him in all respects, they respected him, and loved him, and made great lamentation over him when he died. Let me say to you young men, if you want to have influence over your fellows, do not take to flattering them, and never try to show them how great your talents are, or to make them believe you are somebody of importance. We have soon plenty of flashes in the pan, but the darkness has been just as great afterwards. Believe me, there is no building up of character, except upon sound principles, and there is no building up of influence except upon good character. You

must. seek, God helping you by his Spirit, to prepare and establish your ways before him, and then such influence as you ought to have will come to you. When a man tells me that he is very good, I do not believe it. There are certain people, nowadays, who are writing, and printing, and talking in order to convince us that they are wonderfully holy. I used to think that some of them were so bill they ,aid it themselves; but ever since they have said it, I have gravely questioned whether it is true. If anyone whom I met always told me that he was rich, — well, if I had dealings with him in business, I should want him to pay cash for everything; and when a person tells me that he is holy, — well, I trust him as far as I can see him, and not much further, for really holy men seldom say anything about their own holiness. They have no need to do so, for it always shows itself. Gold glitters quite enough of itself to show what it is, so there is no need for us to say, "That is gold." You do not need to say of these lamps, "They are bright." They say that for themselves by saying nothing, and simply shining.

I have been preaching to you about a very wonderful example of gracious man; I wonder whether on here wish to be like him. I am afraid there are some of you who never try to prepare your ways at all; and as for preparing your ways before the Lord, that idea has never struck you yet. And yet, my dear hearer, what can be so safe a way of living as to live in the love of God ! And what. can be more unhappy than for a man to be out of gear with the omnipotent Creator, — to feel, every day you live, that you are forgetting God, and are ungrateful to him, and that he is angry with you? I hope that this thought will strike some of you to the heart, and make you miserable rail all that is altered; and the way for it to be altered is for you to submit yourself to God by repentance, and by looking to Jesus Christ by faith. May his Holy Spirit, lead you to do so now, and then you will begin to live the happiest of lives, for you will be preparing your ways before the Lord your God.

May God bless you all. for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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2 Chronicles 2:11 A King Sent in Love

Sermon Notes by C H Spurgeon

Then Hiram the king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, Because the Lord hath loved his people, he hath made thee king over them.— 2 Chronicles 2:11

Such was the character of Solomon, that even Hiram could see that he was a blessing to the people over whom he ruled. Be it ours to bless others, whatever our station may be. May it be observed concerning us that, because the Lord loved the family he made us heads of it, friends to it, or servants in it; and so forth.

Even a heathen could trace great blessings to God's love; what heathens those are who do not speak of the Lord's goodness, but talk of "chance" and "good luck"!

It is a great blessing when communications between rulers savor of a pious courtesy, as these between Solomon and Hiram.

This verse may well be applied to our Lord Jesus. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation thereon.

I. THE LOVE OF GOD HAS MADE JESUS OUR KING.

1. It is not, then, a burden to be under law to Christ: his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3).
2. Jesus did not need us for subjects, but we needed to be under the rule and headship of Jesus. It is for our guidance, comfort, honor, growth, success, peace, and safety.
3. It brings us great happiness to obey our Prince. His laws are simply indications of where our felicity lies.
4. The personal character of our King is such that it is a great blessing to his subjects to have him as their Monarch.

So wise: therefore able to judge and to direct.

So powerful: therefore able to enrich and to defend.

So gracious: therefore laying himself out to benefit us all.

So holy: therefore elevating and purifying his people. In this Solomon failed, but Jesus succeeded.

5. His relationship to us makes it a great blessing to have him for our King. We are not under the tyranny of a stranger; but to us is fulfilled the word of the prophet: "Their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21).

The Lord Jesus is, to all of us who are believers:—

Our Brother. Therefore it is no bondage to follow him.

Our Redeemer. Therefore it is joy to own his property in us.

Our Husband. Who would not do the bidding of one so loving?

It is a delight to obey him in all things who has blessed us in all things.

II. THE LOVE OF GOD HAS MADE US THE SUBJECTS OF JESUS.

1. We see this in the choice which the Lord has made of us.

We were like Israel:—

Insignificant in rank, power, or wisdom.

Erring, and continually apt to revolt from our King.

Poor, and therefore unable to pay Him any great revenue.

Feeble, and therefore no help to Him in His grand designs.

Fickle, and consequently a wretched people to rule and lead.

2. We see this in His subduing us.

We began with rebellion, but our Prince conquered us, and brought us under happy subjection because of his great love.

3. We see this in the healthy order He maintains. It is good for us to be under so wise a rule. Love gives rebels a powerful, gracious, and forbearing ruler. A firm hand and a loving heart will tame the unruly, and be a boon to them.

4. We see this in the peace which He creates: the quiet within and without: in the heart and in the church (1 Kings 4:24).

5. We see this in the plenty which He scatters.

"And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance" (2 Chron. 1:15).

Far greater are the riches of grace which the reign of Jesus brings to us.

6. We see this in the honor he puts upon us, making us all to be kings and priests with him (Rev. 1:5-6).

III. OUR LOVE TO GOD MAKES THE REIGN OF JESUS BLESSED TO US.

1. It makes his courts our delight.

2. It makes his service our recreation.

3. It makes his revenue our riches.

4. It makes his glory our honor .

5. It makes his cross our crown.

6. It makes himself our heaven.

Lord, bless thy people, by keeping them loyal and obedient.

Lord, bless rebellious ones, by bringing them to bow before so gracious and wise a Prince.

Lord, we now bless thee for exalting Jesus, to be a Prince and a Savior to us. May his Spirit rest upon us!

2 Chronicles 12:14 Rehoboam the Unready Sermon Notes by C H Spurgeon

And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.— 2 Chronicles 12:14

His is the summing up of Rehoboam's life: he was not so bad as some, but he did evil in various ways, not so much from design as from neglect.

The evil effects of the father's sin and the mother's idolatry were seen in their son, yet there was another cause, namely, a want of heart-preparation. The son of Solomon very naturally desired many wives (2 Chron. 11:23); and it was no marvel that the child of Naamah the Ammonitess allowed images and groves to defile the land; yet there was a deeper cause of his life's evil, and that lay in himself. His heart was not thorough with the Lord, and he, himself, was not carefully consecrated to the worship of Jehovah. He might have done well had he not been Rehoboam the Unready.

I. HE DID NOT BEGIN LIFE WITH SEEKING THE LORD.

1. He was young, and should have sought wisdom of God; but he went to Shechem to meet the people without prayer or sacrifice (2 Chron. 10:1). That which commences without God will end in failure.

2. He leaned on counselors, saying, "What advice give ye?" Of those counselors he chose the worst, namely, the younger and prouder nobles (2 Chron. 10:8). Those who reject divine wisdom generally refuse all other wisdom.

3. He committed great folly by threatening the people, and refusing their just demands; and that while as yet he had not been accepted as their king (2 Chron. 10:13-14). He had none of his father's wisdom. How can they act prudently and prosperously who are not guided of the Lord?

II. HE SHOWED NO HEART IN SEEKING THE LORD AFTERWARDS.

1. He obeyed the prophet's voice when the man of God forbade him to fight with Israel; yet afterwards he forsook the law of the Lord (2 Chron. 12:1). He is said to have been "young and tender-hearted," which means soft (2 Chron. 13:7).

2. He winked at the most horrible crimes among the people whom he ought to have judged (1 Kings 14:24).

3. He fell into his father's sins.

4. He busied himself more for the world than for God. We hear nothing of his worship but much of his building, nothing of his faith but much of his fickleness (2 Chron. 11:5-12).

III. HE WAS NOT FIXED AND PERSEVERING IN HIS SEEKING THE LORD.

1. For three years his loyalty to his God made him prosper, by bringing into Judah all the better sort of people who fled from Jeroboam's calf-worship (2 Chron. 11:13-17), yet he forsook the Lord who had prospered him.

2. He grew proud, and God handed him over to Shisbak (verse 5).

3. He humbled himself and was pardoned, yet he stripped the Lord's house to buy off the king of Egypt.

4. He wrought no great reforms and celebrated no great passover, yet he owned, "the Lord is righteous" (verse 6).

IV. HE HAD NO CARE TO SEEK THE LORD THOROUGHLY.

Yet no man is good by accident: no one goes right who has not intended to do so. Without heart, religion must die.

1. Human nature departs from the right way, especially in kings, who are tolerated in more sin than others.

2. Courtiers usually run the wrong way, especially the young, proud, and frivolous. Rehoboam loved the gay and proud, and gave himself up to their lead.

3. Underlings are apt to follow us and applaud us if we go in an evil path, even as Judah followed Rehoboam. Thus, those who should lead are themselves led.

The kind of preparation required by me, in order to the diligent and acceptable seeking of the Lord, my God, is somewhat after this fashion:

To feel and confess my need of God in the whole of my life.

To cry unto him for help and wisdom.

To yield to his guidance, and not to follow the counsel of vain persons, nor to bluster at those around me.

To be anxious to be right in everything, searching the Scriptures, and seeking by prayer, to know what I should do.

To serve the Lord carefully and earnestly, leaving nothing to chance, passion, fashion, or whim.

Are there any professors among us of the same sort as Rehoboam?

Are there any hopeful young men who lack whole-hearted devotion to the Lord?

Are there any older men who have suffered already from vacillation, hesitation, or double-mindedness?

Are there any just escaped from such trouble who nevertheless are not firm, and ready even now?

Oh, for a clear sense of the evil and folly of such a condition!

Oh, for the confirming power of the Holy Ghost!

Oh, for vital union with the Lord Jesus!

Examples

Before the University Boat race comes off, the men undergo a long and severe training. They would not think of contending for the mastery without preparation; and do we imagine that we can win the race of life at a venture, without bringing under the body and cultivating the mind? The preacher studies his discourse carefully, though it will only occupy part of an hour; and is our life-sermon worthy of no care and consideration? A saintly life is a work of far higher art than the most valuable painting or precious statue, yet neither of these can be produced without thought. A man must be at his best to produce an immortal poem, yet a few hundred lines will sum it all up. Let us not dream that the far greater poem of a holy life can be made to flow forth like impromptu verse.

Well known to me was a kindly, well-disposed gentleman, who, like Rehoboam, was tender-hearted or persuasible. He was a worldling of pleasing manners, who delighted in the esteem of the circle which surrounded him. He had a great respect for religious persons, and especially for ministers; but he could not afford to be a godly man himself, for then he might have become unpopular with a large circle of worldly fashionables. He once quitted an assembly which I addressed, because he said, "I felt almost on the go, and should soon have been converted if I had not rushed out." "There," said he, "Spurgeon, I am like an india-rubber doll when you are preaching; you can make me into any shape you like; but then I get back into my old form when you have done." He was an accurate reproduction of the soft-soured son of Solomon: a very Pliable, easily persuaded to set out on pilgrimage, but equally ready to return at the world's call.

The parable of the two sons will come in here. Rehoboam said, "I go, Sir"; but he went not. The modern Rehoboam is a perfect gentleman: if he did but know his own mind, he would also be a man. He is inclined to obey God, but others incline him to keep in the fashion. He is like the pear which the French call Bon Chretien, very promising, but apt to become sleepy, and to rot at the core. This sort of people is not of much use either to the good cause or to its opposite.

2 Chronicles 20:4 Help Asked and Praise Rendered Sermon Notes by C H Spurgeon

And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. — 2 Chronicles 20:4

The sudden news of a great invasion came to Jehoshaphat, and, like a true man of God, he set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast. The people came together with all speed, and the whole nation earnestly cried to the Lord for his aid.

Let us notice carefully:

I. HOW THEY ASKED HELP.

They expressed their confidence; Jehoshaphat cried, "Art not thou God in heaven? In thine hand is there not power and might" (2 Chronicles 20:6)?

They pleaded his past acts. "Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land?" (2 Chronicles 20:7).

They urged the promise given at the dedication of the temple. Read 2 Chronicles 20:9. "Thou wilt hear and help."

They confessed their condition: humbly did they acknowledge their danger and their impotence. They had:—

No power. "We have no might against this great company."

No plan. "Neither know we what to do" (2 Chronicles 20:12).

No allies. Their wives and their little ones only increased their care (2 Chronicles 20:13).

They then lifted their souls to God. "Our eyes are upon thee." Where could they look with more certainty?

II. HOW THEY RECEIVED IT.

By renewed assurance. "The Lord will be with you" (2 Chronicles 20:17).

By the calming of their fears. "Be not afraid! Fear not, nor be dismayed." Courage keeps the field, but fear flies.

By urging them to greater faith. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established" (2 Chronicles 20:20).

By distinct direction. "Tomorrow go ye down against them; ye shall find them at the end of the brook" (2 Chronicles 20:16)

By actual deliverance. The Moabites and Ammonites slew the Edomites, and Israel triumphed without striking a blow.

It shall be greatly to our joy to see the right hand of the Lord getting us the victory.

III. HOW THEY ACTED BY THIS HELP.

They worshipped. With every sign of reverence, the king and; his people bowed before Jehovah (2 Chronicles 20:18). Worship girds us for warfare.

They praised. Before they received the mercy, "He appointed singers unto the Lord." Read 2 Chronicles 20:21.

They went forth, preceded by the singers, till they reached "the watch-tower in the wilderness" (2 Chronicles 20:24).

They saw the promise fulfilled. "They looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies" (2 Chronicles 20:24).

They gathered the spoil. "They were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much" (2 Chronicles 20:25).

They blessed the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:26). The valley of Berachah heard their joyful notes, and then they returned to the house of the Lord with harps and psalteries and trumpets.

They had rest. "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about" (2 Chronicles 20:30). God's victories end the war. The fear of God fell on all the kingdoms, and they dared not invade Judah.

Let us when in difficulties have immediate resort to the Lord.

Let us do this in the spirit of confidence and praise.

Is there not a cause for our assembling even now to plead against the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites of superstition, worldliness, and infidelity?

Observations

This chapter, which begins with danger, fear, and trouble all round, ends with joy, peace, quiet, and rest. Two words seem to stand out in this chapter — PRAISE and PRAYER — twin sisters which should always go together. One word links them here — FAITH.

"Jehoshaphat set himself to seek the Lord." His good example was soon followed. Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord? What a prayer-meeting — a real one, a united one, with a definite object, and the king presiding! Notice the prayer (2 Chronicles 20:5). It is a pattern one. Jehoshaphat felt his weakness and need; but he recognized that God is all, and over all, and has all power and might. He brings forward every plea and argument. He appeals to God's power and promises, to his justice and love, and winds up with simple yet prevailing faith in God himself. "We have no might, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chronicles 20:12). Placing all the responsibility on God, and they just looking to him, waiting for him: God answered at once. — Captain Dawson, in "Thoughts in the Valleys"

2 Chronicles 28:23 Ruins

Sermon Notes by C H Spurgeon

But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.— 2 Chronicles 28:23

Narrate the actual circumstances. Ahaz turned away from Jehovah to serve the gods of Damascus, because Syria enjoyed prosperity. "For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of, him, and of all Israel."

The consequent introduction of false deities and defilement of the worship of God became the ruin of Ahaz and his kingdom.

We fear lest this should be the ruin of England; for the idols of the Papists and the doctrines of Rome are again being set up in our land. Though no country prospers in which these prevail, yet besotted minds are laboring to restore the gods of the Vatican. This subject deserves many faithful sermons.

At this time we shall turn the text to more general use.

I. THE MAN RUINING HIMSELF Ahaz is the type of many selfdestroyers. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos. 13:9).

He would be his own master. This ruined the prodigal, and will ruin millions more.

He was high-handed in sin. "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel" (2 Kings 16:3-4). This is a race to ruin.

He lavished treasure upon it. He spent much but gained little. Profligacy and many other wrong ways are expensive and ruinous.

He defied chastisement. "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord" (2 Chron. 28:22). This defiance of correction leads to sure ruin.

He was exceedingly clever, and curried favor with the great. He made a copy of a classic altar, and sent it home. More men perish through being too clever than by being simple.

He was a man of taste. He admired the antique, and the esthetic in religion.

He had officials to back him. "Urijah, the priest, built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus" (2 Kings 16:11). Bad ministers are terrible destroyers.

He imitated prosperous sinners. The king of Assyria became his type. This is ruinous conduct.

He abandoned all worship of God." "He shut up the doors of the house of the Lord" (verse 24). This is the climax of rebellion, and the seal of ruin.

But he did not prosper; the false gods were the ruin of him.

II. THE MAN IN RUINS. We leave Ahaz to think of some around us.

The man becomes eaten up with secret vice. A rotting ruin haunted by bats and owls, and foul creatures of the night.

The man of drinking habits, not fit for society, a brute, a fiend.

The man of evil company and foul speech: likely to be soon in prison, or an outcast.

The man of unbelieving notions and blasphemous conversation, lost to God, to goodness, and moral sense.

All around us we see such spiritual ruins.

Turned from holy uses to be moldering wastes.

The man is ruined in:

Peace, character, usefulness, prospects. Worst of all, he is himself a ruin, and will be so for ever.

A ruin suggests many reflections.

What it was! What it might have been!

What it is! What it will be!

Meditations among ruins may be useful to those who are inclined to repeat the experiment of Ahaz.

III. OTHERS RUINED WITH HIM. "They were the ruin of him, and of all Israel."

Designedly. Some men by example create drunkards, by teaching make infidels, by seduction ruin virtue, by their very presence destroy all that is good in their associates.

Incidentally; even without intent they spread the contagion of sin. Their irreligion ruins the young, their conduct influences the unsettled, their language inflames the wicked.

Sin will ruin you, if persisted in.

Your downfall will drag down others.

Will you not endeavor to escape from ruin?

Jesus is the Restorer of the wastes.

Relics

There is an Australian missile called the boomerang, which is thrown so as to describe singular curves, and to return at last to the hand of the thrower. Sin is a kind of boomerang, which goes off into space curiously, but turns again upon its author, and with tenfold force strikes the guilty soul that launched it.

We might illustrate the evil of sin by the following comparison:—"Suppose I were going along a street, and were to dash my hand through a large pane of glass, what harm would I receive?" You would be punished for breaking the glass: "Would that be all the harm I should receive?" "Your hand would be cut by the glass." "Yes; and so it is with sin. If you break God's laws, you shall be punished for breaking them; and your soul is hurt by the very act of breaking them." — J. Inglis

I have heard that a shepherd once stood and watched an eagle soar out from a cliff. The bird flew far up into the air, and presently became unsteady, and reeled in its flight. First one wing dropped, and then the other; presently, with accelerated speed, the poor bird fell rapidly to the ground. The shepherd was curious to know the secret of its fall. He went and picked it up. He saw that when the eagle lighted last on a cliff, a little serpent had fastened itself upon him; and as the serpent gnawed in farther and farther, the eagle in its agony reeled in the air. When the serpent touched its heart, the eagle fell. Have you never seen a man or woman in the church, or in society, rising and rising; the man becoming more and more influential, apparently strong, widely known, asserting power far and near; but, by and by, growing unsteady, uncertain, reeling, as it were, in uncertainty and inconsistency, and at last falling to the earth, and lying there in hopeless disgrace, a spectacle for angels to weep over, and scoffers and devils to jeer at. You do not know the secret of the fall, but the omniscient eye of God saw it. That neglect of prayer, that secret dishonesty in business, that stealthy indulgence in the intoxicating cup, that licentiousness and profligacy unseen of men, that secret tampering with unbelief and error, was the serpent at the heart that brought the eagle down. — T. Curler.

Sages of old contended that no sin was ever committed whose consequences rested on the head of the sinner alone; that no man could do ill and his fellows not suffer. They illustrated it thus: "A vessel, sailing from Joppa, carried a passenger, who, beneath his berth, cut a hole through the ship's side. When the men of the watch expostulated with him, saying, 'What doest thou, O miserable man?' the offender calmly replied, 'What matters it to your The hole I have made lies under my own berth.'" This ancient parable is worthy of the utmost consideration. No man perishes alone in his iniquity; no man can guess the full consequences of his transgression.