**2 Chronicles 19:1-4** June 27, 2021

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 *2 Chronicles 19:1When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, 2Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you. 3There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God.” 4Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Hard Words Taken to Heart**

 Ed Ott. If you collected baseball cards in the early 80’s or late 70’s, you know who Ed Ott is. You know because he had the shortest name in the majors and it always looked funny on the bottom of the baseball cards in a space designed for fifteen or twenty letters. Last week’s featured monarch, King Asa of Judah, was the Ed Ott of the kings of Judah and Israel. He had the shortest name of them all.

 Kids must have given Asa grief for it back in grade school because he seemed determined that no son of his would be ribbed for having the shortest name in the class. So, King Asa named his boy Jehoshaphat, which is the longest name of any Israelite king. That matter of Bible trivia aside, Asa and Jehoshaphat had many similarities.

 For review, or in case you couldn’t join us last week, Asa was a king who began well, but ended badly. Very godly in the early years, but when confronted in middle age with his sin, he tossed God’s prophet into prison, oppressed the people at large, and then resolved to never seek help from the Lord, not even in terminal illness. Such a sad end to one who had been so godly and such a blessing for the first 25 years of his rule.

 Jehoshaphat was born early in the rule King Asa, about five years in. Prince Jehoshaphat grew into a man as his father grew into being king. In Jehoshaphat’s impressionable younger years, his father—what a man—was all that a king should be. He led his nation. He led them back to God. Asa got people back into church, back into the Word. Successful in battle, Asa prayed publicly before marching into battle. What a dad Jehoshaphat had! Jehoshaphat’s young eyes drank it in. He would one day rule like his father!

 So, that’s what Jehoshaphat did. In his early years, like his dad, he got rid of whatever remnants of idolatry there still were in the land. He started a program of sending out religious teachers to all the towns and villages of Judah. He guided God’s people into truly being God’s people.

 Jehoshaphat followed his father in another way. Just like Asa in middle age, Jehoshaphat lost his way. Just like his dad, it was because of a military alliance. King Asa, worrying about bad neighbors rattling their sabres, robbed the Lord’s temple treasuries to pay for an alliance with a pagan kingdom. It worked, but it was far from God-pleasing.

 A generation later Asa’s son Jehoshaphat made an alliance with the northern kingdom of Israel for national security reasons. To Jehoshaphat, it looked innocent enough. He wasn’t allying himself with foreigners, but with cousins, fellow Israelites, the northern kingdom. Why should cousins be enemies? The two kings and thus the two kingdoms made a military alliance. They added economic incentives to the mix. And then they used marriage to cement the deal: Jehoshaphat arranged for his son to marry the daughter of the king of Israel. It looked like a wonderful first step to reunifying the two Israelite kingdoms, north and south.

 But here was the problem: the king and queen of the northern kingdom were the notorious couple, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Maybe you’ve heard of them. Not having time to go into detail, I quote only the Bible’s verdict on them—and here I read from 1 Kings chapter 21—*“There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner…”* (v.25).

 Because of his alliance with *that,* Jehoshaphat, like his father Asa coming back from a successful campaign, at about age 50, Jehoshaphat, also coming back from a successful campaign at about age 50, was confronted by a prophet of the Lord. And here is one more little bit of divine irony: the prophet who confronted Jehoshaphat was the son of the same prophet who had confronted Asa a generation earlier.

 That confrontation, coming back from war, is our Scripture reading:

***[Read 1 Chronicles 19:1-3]***

 Just to be clear here, what the prophet is confronting Jehoshaphat about is that he has allied himself with a king and kingdom who are bitter enemies of the Lord. Jehoshaphat had married his son off to a young woman who followed the ways of her mother, the literal and original Jezebel. And in doing so, not only is he compromising with Satan’s servants, but he is also compromising God’s people, the nation of Judah, with Satan’s servants.

 On the other hand, said the prophet, the Lord still counted Jehoshaphat his child. He had been a good shepherd, shepherding God’s people. But all the good that had been accomplished, and Jehoshaphat’s standing before God, was jeopardized by his current course of action. That’s the substance of Jehu’s rebuke.

 Well, if it’s “Like father, like son,” you know what comes next, right? Last week, when the prophet confronted King Asa, he tossed the prophet into prison and, from what is recorded in the Scriptures, never looked back.

 But here, thankfully, and I mean that sincerely, here by the grace of God father’s and son’s stories parted ways. The next verse tells us, ***“Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers.”***

 Jehoshaphat did an about face. He heard God’s rebuke and he turned around.

 You know how often that happens? It doesn’t. You know what happens when people make choices that people praise and envy, and then a man of God says it was a bad choice? You get scornful and dismissive laughs. “You’re going to tell me how to run my life? It looks like you’re the one who needs help.” You get responses like, “Why don’t you just stick to your prophet business and I’ll stick to my business of being king.” Others, quick with the tongue, love to point out perceived inconsistencies, “Yah? Well, what about the time when you…,” or, “Let me tell you about my experiences with Christians like you…” Others let it ride for the moment, but plot out revenge in the future.

 I could go through a list of kings of Israel in the Bible who did just that. Who started godly enough, then wandered, and then insisted on their own way: kings you know like Solomon; and kings you don’t like Uzziah.

 That is the sinful nature’s response to every rebuke, to every correction from God’s word. *“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so”* (Rom 8:7). That is the sinful nature we are born with, and that persists in us and will war with God’s Holy Spirit till our last breath.

 What I need is a soft heart that withers when God’s word condemns me. May each of you have a childlike faith that is actually saddened when your heavenly Father gives you a talking to. And may you also have a mind that in that moment of sorrow over sin also knows that all of those sins have been forgiven, their guilt paid for and every trace wiped away in the blood of the Lamb. We ask God to give us hearts that listen to words of rebuke, knowing them to be words of love, hurting only to bring cleansing and healing.

 What was Jesus’ word on the issue? *“Blessed are the meek, those who mourn, the poor in spirit.”* Blessed are those who actually listen to what God says. How did he teach us to pray? *“…And forgive us our trespasses,”* because he knew there will never be a day in anyone’s life where we don’t need forgiveness, and need to be reminded that we are forgiven.

 Now with King Jehoshaphat we don’t know what happened at the exact moment of confrontation, when the prophet Jehu met his king face to face. We are simply told the prophet’s rebuke, and then fast forwarded into the future. The impression one gets, and maybe I should only speak for myself here, but the impression I get is that Jehoshaphat kind of walked away and thought about it. Like Jehu’s words struck home, but it took a moment or a day or a maybe even a week to move in the direction that he knew was right. It’s like he knew the prophet spoke truth, but he had so much invested in a way that had seemed so right but now obviously was not, that it took him a while to get his course corrected.

 What brought about the change of heart? Was it simply Jehu’s words? Maybe. Maybe it was also a matter of geography. Do you know who lived right next to the temple in Jerusalem? You might guess, “The high priest,” which wouldn’t be a bad guess. But no. It was the king. The royal palace built by King Solomon was right next to the temple, like neighboring lots in your own neighborhood. Maybe it was the ram’s horn being blown for every single event at the temple. Maybe it was the daily sacrifices for sin occurring just outside Jehoshaphat’s south-facing windows. Maybe it was remembering how his dad, whom he had respected and loved so much, went off the spiritual rails in his later years. Maybe it was reflecting on all the good that God had done for him, making him a member of his chosen people, making him king, and a king who was well-equipped to be king. We don’t know how exactly it worked, but the prophet Jehu’s confrontation with Jehoshaphat marked a turning point in Jehoshaphat’s life.

 From that moment, Jehoshaphat got up, shook off the stupor of a mindset that had gotten wrapped around the things of this world, and ***“he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers.”*** He lived to be the king God had created him to be.

 This joyful moment in Jehoshaphat’s life is perhaps the most purposeful and joyful turn around, repentance, in the entire Bible. He who had been compromising with evil, with God’s enemies, who had been squandering his spiritual inheritance suddenly stops standing in the way of God’s purposes in his life and becomes God’s powerful servant for good. That’s why this one moment in the life of a king you maybe had never heard of is worth remembering.

 Because there will come a day when God’s word will confront you. Not that I want it to be so, but because you share the same sinful flesh I do, I know it will happen. You will be confronted in a devotion, or in the words of a loved one, or a sermon by a pastor, or the little voice of your own conscience. There will come a day when you will be confronted by your own prophet Jehu, who will sternly warn you to mend your ways, to repent of sin, who will ask you big questions about the direction of your life. May that moment fill you with sorrow over sin, but more than that, confidence in a Savior has done everything needed to bring you close to God.

 So, the next time you are watching reruns of M\*A\*S\*H and you hear Colonel Sherman T. Potter shout, “Jumpin’ Jehoshaphat!!!” you’ll know. The Bible says nothing about Jehoshaphat jumping, but it says plenty about the king of Judah with the longest name, a man whose spiritual life had gotten out of whack, who had muddled his calling from God with the things of this world, and who, when he heard the hard and honest appraisal of a man of God, remembering his forgiving and gracious God, joyfully went forth to be the best of what God had called him to be. That’s Jehoshaphat. Amen.