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The Good King That Wasn't II Kings 12:1-21

Intro: In **ch11** we witnessed the miraculous preservation of the Davidic line of kings; the line promised by God to never end. Athaliah was just 1 royal descendent away from winning the whole ballgame and yet, for all her heartless, murderous treachery, she couldn't see Yahweh working in the back rooms of the temple to foil her evil scheme. God worked through 2 faithful believers to rescue the child king from death and then raise him in secret, safely hidden deep within the temple compound. Like a walk-off home run, Joash is crowned and received as the rightful king of Judah and Athaliah meets an untimely end at the horse gate. Though all of Judah would say it was long overdue. As we move into **ch12**, the after glow continues but how long will it last?

1-3 – The beginning of **ch12** seems to follow the regular formula used in the Book of Kings. There's Joash's rise to the throne in **v1** (Jehoash). There's the usual assessment of the king's reign in **v2** and a very familiar qualification in **v3**. What might look like routine and bland repetition to the casual reader is actually a kingdom victory, considering what just occurred in **ch11**. Here we see that Davidic kingship has been stabilized in Judah once again. The line of David will face another crisis with the passing of Joash but not with the same Athaliah intensity. His son Amaziah will reign in his place. But, after dodging a pagan bullet in **ch11**, our text here in the 1st 3 verses is anything but boring for the Davidic dynasty is once again placed on a regular footing. And that truth should be thrilling!

Sure, on the face of it **v1-3** aren't very dynamic and some may think that simple continuity is tedious but all of this speaks to nothing less than the steady faithfulness of our God. Out of the murderous mess of Athaliah's regime with Davidic blood dripping from her hands and tyranny reigning on her throne, there is still a 7 year old descendent of David who begins to reign. What seems like only dry statistics is actually glorious, what appears to be dull is really thrilling! The covenant still works! In spite of everything Satan can throw at it, the covenant still works.

We as God's people today need to grab onto this truth lest we become what

my father would call an ingrate. Surely we recognize that many of God's gifts come to us wrapped in plain brown paper packages and yet, they are still good gifts for all of that. I recall countless Christmas time gift-swaps at church and school throughout my elementary years and occasionally, I would get a gift neatly wrapped in a brown paper grocery bag (I'm that old) but I never rejected a gift just because the wrapping paper wasn't colorful because the paper didn't matter!.

In the same way, mundane mercies are still mercies and ordinary provisions are still provisions. If God has granted that we be born in a nation that's blessed with civil order; where we can, as Paul says in [I Tim 2:2](#), "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence", then it's no less a marvelous blessing for all its apparent ordinariness. The reality is, there are no ordinary providences. All of God's blessings and provisions should be thrilling and we should be truly thankful for every one of them because not of them are earned, none of them are deserved. The Lord blesses His people because He is a blessing-giving God not because we are a blessing-deserving people.

The remainder of the record of Joash's reign is divided into 2 contrasting sections: 1st) refurbishing the temple ([4-16](#)); 2nd) depleting the temple ([17-18](#)). The 1st section is longer and can be a bit confusing so we'll take it in smaller bites

4-6 – After the 6 year reign of Athaliah, the temple had fallen into a miserable state of disrepair. Some or most of this may have been caused by Athaliah because [II Chron 24:7](#) tells us that her sons broke in and vandalized the temple. Now King Joash has come up with a plan to refurbish and restore the temple. He commands the priests to start designating (diverting) certain offerings for the building fund. He selects 3 categories of offerings: 1) the half-shekel temple tax required from every male in Judah of military age; 2) money from those who vowed service to the temple but chose to give their service in cash and 3) monies that came in as voluntary gifts. The priests were to collect these funds from their assistants and see that the repairs were carried out on the temple.

As commonly happens, things go slowly in the church. We don't know when Joash first gave his order for the temple repairs but by his 23rd year on the throne, the priests had made no repairs to the temple. We can understand

why Joash was concerned for the temple; it had been his home for the first 7 years of his life. You would think that the priests would be interested in seeing it restored because that was where they ministered to the Lord, that's where they served Him. It's possible that the priests figured they had enough to do maintaining the work inside the temple to be bothered by dealing with the outside. Whatever the reason, the work wasn't done and the king wanted answers

7-8 – Joash calls Jehoiada & Co on the carpet and demands to know why they were slacking with the temple repairs. It's not as if he was asking for all the money to go into the building fund. The temple had a regular income derived from several different sources. Joash just wanted to designate a portion of that money to a particular project. Well, kings don't have to wait for answers – at least Joash didn't! He simply orders them to go to Plan B – which bypasses the priests altogether. The priests agree to not divert any more money and they relinquish all responsibility for repairing the temple damage. The author presents all this to us in a matter-of-fact way but I would've liked to have been a fly on the wall of that business meeting! I'll bet the atmosphere was warm in the room. (diaper syndrome)

Were the priests being dishonest here? Not likely because if they had been devious with the previous funds then they wouldn't have been entrusted to collect the repair funds. When the priests received the initial funds, it's more likely that they just never got around to it. They were probably more slow than slick. But, what was the solution?

9-16 – It seems old Jehoiada came up with a genius idea of an offering box! Take an old wooden chest, drill a hole in the top and mark it as "Temple Repair Project." They may have also had a big poster board with a thermometer drawn on it with different monetary goals set for each month or year. This allowed people to separate their offering for temple repair from their offering for the priests. They could see for themselves that the money would not be used for anything other than what it was given for. When the people realized the project was now under royal supervision and in the hands of the workers, it encouraged them to give even more and they gave generously. King Josiah will follow a similar pattern when he repairs the temple nearly 200 yrs later (**22:1-7**).

Now, to highlight the honesty of the collection, none of the funds for

refurbishing the temple were used to make any temple utensils – it was all for external repairs. They didn't even require any complicated accounting system of the building funds because the supervisors and the craftsmen were totally honest. I'm sure this arrangement grated on the nerves of the temple secretary, "I must have receipts!" And, lest anyone feel the need to organize a sympathy march for the priests, the author assures us that they were able to retain their customary income – no harm, no foul.

The real question is: was all this trouble necessary? The temple is just a building. God didn't reside there. This is a question that has plagued believers since Christians began building churches. We know that the Lord doesn't live in church buildings or any other building but that doesn't mean it's wrong to designate buildings for His service and glory. Some Christians oppose church buildings, saying they're a waste of God's money while others practically worship their buildings. Both are a sign of confused priorities. G. Campbell Morgan speaks to this issue with a warning: Whereas the house of God today is no longer material but spiritual, the material is still a very real symbol of the spiritual. When the Church of God in any place in any locality is careless about the material place of assembly, the place of its worship and work, it is a sign and evidence that its life is at a low ebb. A beautiful building isn't always evidence of a beautiful spirit but a church in disrepair can point to a lack of concern for more than just a building.

Clearly, the temple restoration is a testament to the king's piety, right? He's a pious king, right?

17-18 – Right here, it all falls apart. After 13 verses depicting the tedious refurbishing of the temple, we're given just 2 verses that report the emptying of the temple! Hazael, king of Syria (remember him? Back like a bad dream!); has just knocked off the Philistines in Gath and has turned his sights on Jerusalem. It appears Joash prefers bribery to battle! But don't misunderstand the author's intent here. He's not commending Joash on making a smart move, giving peace a chance. On the contrary, he's bemoaning the king's disappointing reaction to Hazael's threat!

Forking over the temple treasures for political or military security never gets high marks in the Book of Kings whether it occurs during the reign of Rehoboam, Asa, Joash, Ahaz or Hezekiah. It's not a matter of strict fiscal

accounting because monetary values are never mentioned and in each case there's the implication of an almost total depletion of the temple treasury. The significance of these treasures is that they serve as tangible signs of a king's piety and of his kingdom's favor with God. So it's no small thing that Joash is pressed to such an extent that he willingly takes everything from the store of holy objects. Despite his provision for regular repairs to the temple, a question mark hangs over his reign. As far as the Book of Kings is concerned, Joash's reign is a disappointment.

But, wait just a minute! If Joash is merely a disappointment, why does Hazael show up at his doorstep, leering at all his riches? Isn't it Hazael's job to be an instrument of judgment in God's hand against an idolatrous and unrepentant Israel? Yes it is and now that you've mentioned it; it seems odd that he'd be down south harassing Judah, unless...

Let's turn to [II Chron 24](#) to get, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story ([24:19-25](#))! While Kings highlights the disappointment of Joash, Chronicles highlights the wickedness of Joash. He wasn't just a disappointment, he was a shocking disappointment!

The writer of Kings doesn't elaborate on any of this in his record but he does drop us a glaring hint to this in [vs2](#). We begin to realize there's a defect in Joash's piety right from the beginning. The problem was Joash's faith was shallow and he had the propensity to be a man-pleaser. Obviously, Jehoiada had a great influence over Joash; he was most likely the only father figure he ever had in his life. But, it appears that Joash's piety was mostly meant to please or at least appease Jehoiada. There is no indication that Joash was ever concerned with pleasing Yahweh. Yes, he worked hard at repairing the temple but that was probably more for his image and the image of his kingdom than a concern for the Lord or the proper worship of Him.

Some might say this is just speculation but [II Chron 24](#) reveals Joash's shallow faith and men-pleasing character after the death of Jehoiada. He was eager to please the leaders of Judah when they visited him to ask that he be more lenient in religious matters. He relented and they turned his heart to Canaanite practices and once again, idolatry swept into Judah and Jerusalem.

Joash's apostasy was an act of willful rebellion against God. He knew what

the Law of Moses taught about idolatry. It was also a sin of ingratitude for all that Jehoiada had done for him. He and his wife had saved Joash's life; he had taught him the truth of God's Word and had stood by the young king's side as he learned to govern the people. But Joash had never taken the truth into his heart and allowed it to take root. The soil of his heart was shallow and he had only obeyed God's law because his mentor was watching.

Joash is a sober warning to believers today. It isn't enough to simply know God's truth; we must obey His truth from the heart ([Eph 6:6](#)). Truth in the mind can lead to obedience but only truth in the heart and obedience from the heart will produce godly character in a person. Both God's Word and God's will must be internalized or we will never develop consistent Christian character ([Ps 119:9, 11](#)). Unless duty and discipline become our delight, we are only reluctant servants who obey God because we have to, not because we want to. Fear is not a proper motivation for serving the Lord, nor is compulsion. Only service that is offered out of love will be acceptable and rewarded.

Jehoiada was just a religious prop on which king Joash leaned. When the prop was removed, the king fell. Sadly, the Joash syndrome is an all too common tragedy in Christian circles today. People go along with God for quite a while and then something happens that turns them away or nothing happens. If you're just going with the flow in your spiritual walk, it won't take much to change your direction. I've known many a "Christian" with plenty of potential but it is never realized because, well, they'd rather just do something else.

A good beginning is no guarantee of a good ending. King Joash had every encouragement to become a godly man but he failed to take advantage of his opportunities by taking God's truth into his heart. Even when God graciously sent prophets to warn him, he refused to listen. He even plotted with the leaders of Judah to have Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, stoned (and not in the hippie way). His only crime was rebuking the king for his sin. Imagine sinking so low in your sin that you feel comfortable murdering the son of the very people that saved your life! The boy king who made such a good beginning had a bad ending and all because he forsook the way of the Lord.

19-21 – The writer of Kings gives no indication of Joash’s wounding by the Syrians as the Chronicler does. It’s quite possible that the books record to separate engagements by the Syrians. In the first 1 (**Kings**) Hazael accosts Judah with a formidable army and Joash pays him to leave him alone. Well, you know what happens when you feed a feral animal? It always comes back for more! In the next episode (**Chron**) Hazael comes upon Jerusalem with a rather small army and God delivers it into his hand and that’s when Joash is wounded. It seems some of his constituents are dissatisfied with his royal decision making (armchair quarterbacks) and decide for themselves that it’s time for Joash to be gathered to his people. “The king is at death’s door; let’s help pull him through!”

It looks as if God’s providence has been frustrated by human failure once again. Joash’s story began on such a trilling note with the marvelous (and gutsy) preservation of the Davidic line. His reign that featured a persevering and successful renovation of the temple now ends in disappointment and involuntary and untimely death. Joash’s reign should act as a yellow flashing light of warning to all of us. We may be orthodox believers in our profession of Christ but unless we are kept by the power of Christ, what will prevent us from falling away like Joash?

The failure of Joash, the descendent of David, should cause us to lift our eyes to the only descendent of David that doesn’t disappoint! There is a built-in defect in all merely human leadership (recognizing this will save you much anger and gnashing of teeth in the church). But the failure and folly of men should only make us crave, enjoy and rejoice in the fullness and faithfulness of Jesus all the more. He is the only one who satisfies!

When we believe the truth, internalize it, act on it; then God works for us, in us and through us to accomplish His will in our lives and in the lives of those around us, the people we influence by our faith and obedience. When we believe a lie, when we believe we can determine our own destiny, lean on our own understanding, make our own way; then we open the door for Satan to work against us to bring defeat, despair and destruction into our lives. 😊