

## **When All Bets Are Off**

‘A man woke up in the morning deeply repentant after a bitter fight with his wife the previous night. He noticed with dismay the crate of beer bottles that had caused the fight. He took it outside and started smashing the empty bottles one by one onto the wall. He smashed the first bottle swearing, “you are the reason I fight with my wife”. He smashed the second bottle, “you are the reason I don’t love my children”. He smashed the third bottle, “you are the reason I don’t have a decent job”. When he took the fourth bottle, he realized that the bottle was still sealed and was full. He hesitated for only a moment and said “you stand aside, I know you were not involved”.’

I think this joke could be titled, “Short-term Repentance”. Which, is not really repentance at all. In the short parable our Lord taught us in Matthew 21:28-32, the older son at first rebelled, flat out refusing to do as the father had commanded. But later he “changed his mind and went anyway”. So in the end, he did obey his father. The key here is “he changed his mind and went anyway”. “He changed his mind”. This is the very definition of repentance. It’s turning around. Turning back to God and God’s ways. The reward for doing this is literally eternal life in Heaven with God, because of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross.

Our series of readings from II Kings provide example after example. In today's chapter 11, Athaliah, the queen mother, was dismayed to learn that her son, King Ahaziah of Judah, had been murdered by Jehu of Israel because of Ahaziah's alliance with Israel's wicked, previous king, Joram. Ahaziah barely reigned 1 year. Sometimes, it just doesn't pay to be royalty. Your next day could be your last. Seems someone is always out to get you, to kill you, literally! But we have to remember just how depraved, dysfunctional and demonically-influenced most of both Israel's and Judah's kings were. So, after just a year on the throne, Judah's Ahaziah was assassinated by Jehu's men. Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, was understandably upset. But she, too, was as evil as they come, for her stepfather had been the vilest King Ahab of Israel. Seeing now that her influence upon her son the king was no more because he was no more, and because of Jehu's slaughter of Ahab's immediate family, as the only one left, she decided to take things into her own hands. She mercilessly and ruthlessly murdered all the remaining family of her son who had been born of David's lineage. Eliminating every person who could have even the slightest claim on Judah's throne as a descendant of David's line was the goal. She thought she'd succeeded.

But God. God intervened, for God had promised that a descendant of David would always sit upon David's throne. The youngest offspring of Ahaziah was newly born, and by the cunning of Princess Jehosheba, he and his nurse were saved from

the massacre. Jewish historian Josephus tells us that Princess Jehosheba, was not only Ahaziah's half-sister, being the daughter of Israel's previous king, Joram, she was also the half-sister of Athaliah herself. What a tangled web royal marriages create!! Yet royal genealogists keep everything meticulously figured out!

Anyway, Princess Jehosheba took baby Joash and his nurse, and hid them, not in a regular bedroom, but apparently in a storeroom of linens and mattresses, etc. This wasn't a room to escape to for quick concealment. But God made the ruse work. Little baby Joash not only survived his infancy, but grew up hidden in the Temple, unnoticed by Athaliah who'd declared herself queen regnant immediately upon her son Ahaziah's assassination. Her wicked, illegitimate reign wore on and enemies proliferated. Six long years later, in her seventh year as queen, the priest Jehoiada, Princess Jehosheba's husband, knew it was time to act. Secretly identifying those loyal to David's line, and the hidden Joash, first in line to the throne, they staged a plot which culminated in a coronation ceremony declaring Joash as the next king, though he was only seven years old. With a loyal cadre of officers, guards, and courtiers surrounding him, by God's blessing, he then reigned as Judah's king for the next 40 years.

When Queen Athaliah heard the commotion coming from the Temple, she went out and beheld her supposed-to-be-dead grandson, Joash, standing by the pillar of governing authority, joyously proclaimed their new king by the people. She screamed

“Treason! Treason!” But she had too many enemies, most importantly God Himself, the few who came to her defense were quickly dispatched by the troops loyal to the new king. Dragging her outside the Temple courts, since human blood was not to be shed within the Temple’s holy precincts, she was summarily killed that very day in the palace. She, who had picked up where her stepmother Jezebel left off and had reinstated the pagan worship of the demonic spirit baal, now, finally, met her much deserved fate.

It seems clear that the demonic spirit or spirits that had inhabited and motivated former Queen Jezebel had moved on at her death and taken up residence in Athaliah. It was a fitting end for her, but, unfortunately not for the idolatry and influence of the demons on the royal families. For Israel’s kings continued to follow the world’s ways, worshipping idols and thereby opening themselves up to all things evil. Judah’s kings mostly alternated from good to bad and back again. But even the good ones never wholeheartedly followed God, always leaving untouched some pagan altars where many of the people worshipped. God’s painstaking teaching never sunk in. Some years of relative stability were always followed by instability and threats of the nation’s destruction at the hands of powerful enemies. But such was the fate of the people who refused to fully follow the Lord at best, and at worst, outright rebelled against Him.

As we here look back nearly 3,000 years to that history, God is telling us Americans to learn from it. For we’re repeating it! Is

not our current regime in Washington, D.C. abominably evil? Our constitution, by God's grace, has been holding back much of the effects of their evil on us, God's people. And the God-given respite in President Trump and his appointment of three conservative, constitutionalist Supreme Court justices has kept the worst evils at bay so far. But the demonic spirits that have been "waiting in the wings" as it were, are waiting no longer. With the precipitous decline of the knowledge of the Holy Bible and the concomitant confusion over Who God is and if He even exists at all, is it any wonder that we now find our country in this dizzying decay into depravity? We, mostly senior-age Christians, are living in our little bubbles of cultural conservatism and traditionalism. Because we mostly associate with others of like mind and behaviors, we easily grow complacent. The unimaginable horrors of what the powers that be are planning for us remain at the periphery of our consciousness. For it is so much easier to keep them just out of reach of our mind's eye. It's so much more pleasant to pretend things aren't as bad as they really are; that they're not as dangerous and deadly and right under our noses as they really are. We're living right this minute in times when all bets are off!

Right now, the evil that's been proliferating in our world is so much more overpowering and dominating than we realize. It's permeated our schools, our stores, our food, even our churches. It's truly crept up on us, mostly unnoticed! We've more or less lived our lives obeying God, as much as we've really paid atten-

tion to how we do things and treat our fellow man. Meanwhile the world around us has been literally going to hell in a hand basket. What's normal now is so bad that it's become increasingly obvious that we've nearly entered a terminal cancer. Evil has such an upper hand now that it finally no longer sees a need to try to hide its workings and nefarious plans for all humanity. Literally, the prophecies in the Book of Revelation are manifesting right in front of our eyes. So what are we, the "good" people, to do?

Well, all is not lost. For sure. The more we beseech God in earnest prayer, He hears us. For a great turnaround, the greatest ever revival in history, has always been His plan. How this is actualized, we don't know. What we do know is that there will be judgement involved. There has to be. Look at how God dealt with Israel and Judah. Unrepentant sin of such enormous magnitude has to be punished. There's no escaping it! America, which so knew the Lord and His ways in our past, has so rejected Him and His ways that to actually see it is terrifyingly bloodcurdling. We must prepare for the worst, the best we can, while hoping and praying for the best. This is not a cliché! We must be praying for God's mercy! Not just at church, but in our personal, individual prayers. We're truly at a tipping point. The time to get serious was yesterday! Yes, we will always have peace in the Lord. And we are never to be fearful. But, as God's people, we're each called by Him to be soldiers in His army of righteousness. Draw close to Him, and always do right by everyone and everything.

