

HOW GOD WORKS FAITH - 2 KINGS 11:1-3, 12-18

Pastor Colin Rieke - August 23, 2015

When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. ² But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. ³ He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled the land. ¹² Jehoiada brought out the king's son and put the crown on him; he presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. They anointed him, and the people clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!" ¹³ When Athaliah heard the noise made by the guards and the people, she went to the people at the temple of the LORD. ¹⁴ She looked and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was. The officers and the trumpeters were beside the king, and all the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her robes and called out, "Treason! Treason!" ¹⁵ Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders of units of a hundred, who were in charge of the troops: "Bring her out between the ranks and put to the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest had said, "She must not be put to death in the temple of the LORD." ¹⁶ So they seized her as she reached the place where the horses enter the palace grounds, and there she was put to death. ¹⁷ Jehoiada then made a covenant between the LORD and the king and people that they would be the LORD's people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people. ¹⁸ All the people of the land went to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They smashed the altars and idols to pieces and killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

One of the ways in which the Bible far surpasses any other religious book is not just because of the wonderful, moral teaching, it's not just because of the promise of a Savior, but it's the rich history which it contains - real history. When you page through the Old Testament, you see account after account of God's people. Sometimes you see the good things that people did, and other times you see the shameful things that people did. But through all of that, you see God working his plan - both through people and in spite of people.

When you take a look at the history of the kings of Israel you see a trend that weaves its way through the centuries and the two kingdoms which Israel broke into. On the most basic scale, the Bible describes the kings in one of two ways, either they followed God and his laws, or they ignored God and followed after the gods of their forefathers. But what is interesting is there is no rule of thumb for which king will be good and which king will be bad. Sometimes, God works through a good father like David, who passes down a godly heir in the form of Solomon. But it didn't always work like that. One of the bright shining kings in the land of Judah was a man by the name of Hezekiah - he followed the Word of the Lord. How he did so was a miracle, because his father Ahaz was a godless man.

All of this illustrates a very important point that none of us can take faith for granted. Just because we may be a godly person who has faith in God's grace, it doesn't necessarily mean our kids will follow. Yes, to the parents, and even grandparents, we will do whatever we can to bring our kids up in the faith, but we can't believe for them. This morning, as we take a look at the story of Athaliah and Joash, we are reminded of the important truth of HOW GOD WORKS FAITH.

1. He works through people

2. He works in spite of people

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It is a long and convoluted history that led us to the story we have before us this morning, it's a history that contains a number difficult sounding names. Let me try and simplify it for you. Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, had been married to the King of Judah. When her husband died, her son took the throne. Her son, because of his wickedness had been killed. This left Athaliah in an interesting predicament. She was certainly not next in line for the throne, but still wanted to rule. She did what any "potential ruler" would do when faced with the unlikely chance of ruling. She killed off all the heirs. These were likely her step sons, born to the king by other women.

But even here, we see HOW GOD WORKS FAITH, he works through people. Two parents, stole away a young prince and his nurse, to keep the wicked plot from being fulfilled. And so for six years, the young prince grew up in the temple, the last place wicked queen Athaliah would look. But just because Athy had made herself queen, didn't necessarily mean that she had the support of the people. It seems like the people lived in fear of Athaliah, afraid of what she could do to them.

After six years, a priest by the name of Jehoiada took the young prince Joash and made him king in the temple. Beforehand, he had gained the support of the military and the spiritual leaders in Jerusalem, so that this was not just a powerless coup. The priest anointed the young king, and handed him a copy of the covenant - which was a copy of the laws of God's people. The people who were there rejoiced - not only was this young king a direct descendent of David, but it would mean the end of the rule of the wicked queen Athaliah.

With all of the commotion going on in the temple, Athaliah was bound to hear it, and she did. She came running into the temple, and what she saw stunned her. There was a young boy with a crown on his head and the people all shouting "**Long live the king!**" How could they do such a thing? She was the queen. This boy couldn't have been a legitimate descendent of the king, she had killed all of them off six years earlier. But she was all alone, having left her entourage at the gates of the temple. Even tearing her clothes and shouting "**treason, treason**" didn't have any effect. The people had made their decision, and we see how GOD WORKS FAITH, he works through their people, in this case his aunt and uncle, to accomplish his purpose of bringing about young Joash to the throne.

As parents (and grandparents), and especially Christian parents (and grandparents), what is one of the most important things we want for our kids? Of course we want to give them every

chance they can to succeed in life, we want them to be happy. But most of all I think we want them to grow up to be Christian adults, believing in the same faith we do, cherishing the grace that we know in Christ. And as Christian parents, we will want to do everything in our power to make that happen. We will bring them to church to hear God's Word, we will get them baptized, we will read devotions at home, we will teach them the truths of God's Word as we live it out in our daily lives.

And the wonderful thing is, what we know about HOW GOD WORKS FAITH, we know that God wants to work through people, especially parents. This is his most natural way of bringing about saving faith in a child's life. When a parent brings their child to the waters of baptism as an infant, trusting in God's promise that the water is more than just plain water, but water connected with God's Word which works in the heart of a child. Having a child grow up in a Christian home provides a nurturing environment for that faith to grow. GOD WORKS FAITH in a miraculous way through their parents.

But unfortunately, we have heard far too many stories about kids raised in a godly household only to leave the faith later in life. It isn't a given that godly parents will have godly offspring. It wasn't a given in the line of the kings of Israel and Judah, and it's not a given in our day today. Because while the parents can provide the best environment possible, they can't make a kid believe.

And then that makes parents wonder what they did wrong - were they too harsh or were they too lax? Did they always act like godly parents, or did they often lose their cool? And whether you're a parent or not, there will always be that wondering about how we act, does it influence others in the wrong way. Because even though there are those times where we have tried to be godly, tried to act Christian, we know there have been just as many times that we haven't. It's true, most, if not all of us have not acted like Athaliah did in killing off the descendants to the throne. But there have been times where have failed to love our neighbor as ourself.

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It's at times like these that we wonder if any good can come out of our actions. But then we can remember that not only DOES GOD WORK through our actions, he can also work in spite of our actions. See how God worked in spite of the actions Athaliah, the wicked queen.

Athaliah's time as ruler was at an end. Jehoiada the priest saw to that, **"Bring her out between the ranks and put to the sword anyone who follows her."** **"So they seized her as she reached the place...and there she was put to death."** Not only do we see here how God worked in spite of the wickedness of Athaliah, but we see how he worked for the ultimate good. Because the young king, the king who was stolen away from the other princes at birth, was the last remaining descendent of King David. Why is this important? Not only because God promised that David would always have a descendent on the throne, but also because of a specific descendant who would reign on the throne of David. That specific descendant is none other than Jesus Christ. He became the ultimate king in his actions for us. His action of saving us through his sacrifice on the cross made him our king.

And so you see, God acted to preserve the line of the Savior right here in this story, in spite of Athaliah's actions. And if God can work to preserve the line of the Savior in spite of the actions of wicked people, we know God can work to create faith where and when he chooses, even in spite of our actions - as parents or otherwise. For in spite of our actions, he has put faith in our hearts. He has put the faith to recognize how utterly lost we are without him and to humbly repent of our lives which has offended him. This same faith clings to God's promise of that son of David - Jesus Christ - as the only solution to the problem of sin. And this faith also realizes how offensive God's Word can be to those who don't believe.

See how it tore King Joash's family apart. On account of God's Word, there was division in his household. On account of rejecting God's Word, his grandmother Athaliah was put to death. And isn't this what Jesus spoke about in the gospel? Jesus said, **"I have not come to bring peace, but division."** God's Word is a dividing line - either you believe and follow it, or you don't. And this division can happen right within your own household. We certainly will not go looking for division, but when someone refuses to listen to what God's Word says, there will be division.

It was this division that was found toward the end of our story this morning. After the wicked queen Athaliah died, God's covenant was renewed. This was the agreement that the people would follow after the Lord, the king would act in accord with the Lord's decrees, and the people would respect the king as God's representative. A result of this covenant meant that they would go and tear down the temple of the false god Baal, for error can have no place with truth. Now God has not called us to tear down every pagan temple and deity to which people ascribe, but we are to be able to point out the error both in the lives of others, and in our own lives. This is important because any error, no matter how small, diminishes faith.

We can see the precarious nature of faith throughout the history of the Old Testament as you have some kings who follow God, and other kings who do not. We see HOW GOD WORKS FAITH through godly parents, and we see HOW GOD WORKS FAITH in spite of parents. May these truths give us comfort as continually strive to not only maintain our faith, but by God's help inspire the faith of others, knowing that while our best efforts can never merit salvation, God's best efforts, already have. Amen.

The Season of Pentecost

After reliving the great events of the life of Christ, the worshipping Church spends half a year focusing on the teachings of Christ. The Church wears green during the season of Pentecost as the Spirit uses those teachings of Jesus to grow the faith of believers. A believer will hear God's warning that the Word doesn't bring peace, but division.