

The Story: The Kingdoms Fall

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I can't look over my shoulder because those guys are really good, and they tease me because when I look over my shoulder, it's, I'm not trusting them, so I need to trust them. So if I start to read a passage of Scripture and no one out here is talking, I'll know that I shouldn't have trusted them.

Aha! Okay, it's Groundhog Day. Did you know that? And I don't know exactly what happened. There are 8,200 groundhogs around the world, depending on which particular one you follow.

There's Punxsutawney Phil in the U.S. There's a Canadian groundhog, eh? So I don't know how it relates to pastors, but I did see my shadow this morning, so I think that means 47 more weeks of church for the rest of the year.

So I don't know. Take it or leave it. So a few pastoral announcements. I'll be away Monday through Wednesday this week attending our church regional pastors meeting at Gull Lake.

I was going to say in Gull Lake, but that's impossible. But at Gull Lake. So that's a great opportunity. Pray for safe travels for all the pastors from around our region who will be attending, and that it would be a time of connecting and learning as pastors gather together and worship God.

[1 : 1 6] Do you know if your remote is working? Oh, really? This new pastor stuff is nonsense.

Thanks, Leah. You know, sometimes you just can't think of everything. So what's that? Oh, yeah. Go ahead, and we'll continue.

There we go. So speaking of moron, that's me. So an oxymoron. Are you familiar with what an oxymoron is?

I was used to say that an oxymoron is someone who doesn't know how to use acne medication. Oxymoron. Never mind. So you know how much I love language and communication.

And so an oxymoron is a figure of speech in which two apparently opposite ideas are joined to create an effect. So here are some examples of oxymorons.

[2 : 1 6] Act naturally. Clearly confused. Deafening silence. That's one I really like. Farewell reception.

You ever thought of that one? A farewell reception. Okay. My personal favorites have always been these, and they were my dad's favorites too. Jumbo shrimp.

Postal service. And Rob, where's Rob? Rob's not in here right now. But Rob, no disrespect. Military intelligence. So we see clear and deliberate contradictions in those expressions.

They're expressions that seem to defy common sense, don't they? They don't really make sense. And have you ever considered this before? I have.

Common sense doesn't really seem to be that common, does it? Especially when you're driving or when you see people interact with one another. Or do you maybe recognize in your own life that someone can explain something to you or ask you to do something?

- [3 : 26] Or a situation may call for you to act or behave in a certain way, but you just decide, I don't want to. You decide that you want to do what you want, even if that's not the right thing.
- Or do you recognize in yourself or others that sometimes a course of action that will ultimately lead us to hurt someone or hurt ourselves is at play.
- A course of action that will quite clearly pull us away from God. And even though we may clearly recognize that in a situation, we ultimately decide to do it anyway.
- Despite all the alarm bells that go off or the red flags that are madly waving right in front of our eyes, we make bad decisions or even clearly stubborn and sinful ones.
- I think we'd all agree that even though we know full well that it might create a sense of ouch for ourselves or someone else, we make decisions that at times may defy common sense.
- [4 : 43] And as Christians, we can likely also recognize that some of those decisions may defy God or his will for our lives.
- This morning, as we continue in our sermon series on this story, I hope you've been enjoying the journey as much as I have, because we're walking through the Bible together, the whole Bible.
- And we're seeing how, I hope, it applies to our daily lives. Our sermon this morning is titled, I did it, I looked over my shoulder, did you see that?
- Our sermon this morning is titled, The Kingdom's Fall. And we'll be focusing on 2 Kings 21. We've seen along our journey through the story so far, and that story is the Bible.
- We've seen how God made promises to Moses and to Abraham, that he would show his love to all people and call them back to himself.
- [5 : 47] God promised to David that he would bring the Messiah through his family, that line of Judah, and we talked about that last week, the line of the southern nation of Judah.
- We've also recognized over the past couple of weeks that even though God's people fail to obey, and the kingdom is split into two smaller, weaker nations, God's promises remain unconditional, and he will fulfill them.
- Last week, we learned that the kingdom of Israel went into exile to Assyria in 722 BC. But what happened to the kingdom of Judah?
- That brings us to 2 Kings 21. Remember that the kingdom of Judah had both good and bad kings. Last week, we talked about Hezekiah.
- He was faithful to God and sought to point people to God through his actions and obedience. He sought God first, and in turn, we recognize that God blessed his reign.
- [7 : 04] And as I mentioned last week, there were often family connections during the times of the kings of Israel and Judah. And so when Hezekiah's reign was over, he was succeeded by his son Manasseh.
- And as great and godly and good as his father was, Scripture tells us that Manasseh did more evil in the eyes of God than any other king.
- That's quite a legacy, isn't it? To get a bit of a summary of this era, let's read 2 Chronicles 36, 15-16 together.
- The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.
- But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people, and there was no remedy.
- [8 : 15] Of the last six kings in Judah, only Josiah, who began his reign as an eight-year-old king.

Stop and think about that for a second. Ruling a nation at eight years old. Wow. So let's return to Manasseh then.

Just how bad was he? As the jokes often go, well, he was so bad. So 2 Chronicles 33, verses 1 and 2 talks about that, and I'll read it for us.

Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 55 years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

He, that's Manasseh, rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished. He also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles.

[9 : 26] Let me pause there for a second. Idle worship. That's what that is. That's all you need to know. Not God. Idle worship. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them.

He built altars in the temple of the Lord. What's wrong with that, you may think? Not altars to the Lord. The Lord had said, My name will remain in Jerusalem forever.

In both courts of the temple of the Lord, Manasseh built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists.

He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger. If you're going to make a list of all the things not to do, folks, there it is.

So not only did Manasseh undo the good that his father had done, we learned that Hezekiah tore down all the idol worship, returned the people to God, returned their focus, returned their allegiance to God.

[10 : 51] Manasseh undid it all. So not only did he do that, desecrating his father's legacy, but he also deliberately acted against God and brought corruption into God's very temple.

Given the depth and breadth of Manasseh's evil acts as king, ultimately God cannot continue to bless Judah, as it would send a confusing message.

Not just to them, but to other nations as well. Remember, God's goal is always to draw people back to Him.

He wants to be with His people. But the people of Judah, under the rule of Manasseh, sunk about as low as they possibly could have.

God warns Judah of exile, but through the prophet Ezekiel, God promises to fulfill His purpose that ultimately all nations will know Him.

[12 : 02] The Bible says in Ezekiel 36, verse 23, and it's God speaking here. Let's read this together. I will show the holiness of my great name, which had been profaned among the nations.

The name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the sovereign Lord, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.

God's express purpose in His relationship with Israel is always to demonstrate that He is the one true God who wants people to come back into relationship with Him.

As we've learned, when God's people stubbornly disobey Him, punishment will follow. So what form did God's punishment of Judah take?

How were the people of Judah punished? Just as the Assyrians defeated the kingdom of Israel in the north, God raised up the Babylonians to judge the southern kingdom, sinful Judah.

[13 : 19] The Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and destroyed Jerusalem and Judah in 586 BC, and they took prisoners into exile.

The fall of the northern and southern kingdoms of God's people are hard stories. They're hard things for us to hear about.

But they're ultimately valuable lessons for us in faith. Because despite the sinful and stubborn rebellion of His people, in our own stubborn sinfulness and bad choices, when we lose all perspective or common sense, God always offers a promise of hope.

God never gave up on His people. He sent prophet after prophet during these difficult times, as we've learned. And even though the people chose their own way again and again, God never gave up on them.

God called the prophet Jeremiah, sometimes known as the weeping prophet. I had never heard that. To be the prophet over Judah during the time of their fall.

[14 : 38] Have you ever recognized how early, if you're familiar with Jeremiah, how early his call from God came? It came fairly early.

Really, really early, in fact. The Bible says in Jeremiah 1, 4-5, let's read this together. The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

Before you were born, I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. For knowledge. Before, as the expression goes, before Jeremiah was even a twinkle in his father or mother's eye, God knew who he would be.

God had predestined him for a specific purpose. God knew Jeremiah and had a specific role for him to play in his story.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2, verse 10, that God calls us to, let's read this together. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

[15 : 59] He prepared things in advance for us to do. Friends, we all have a role. I don't care how insignificant you think yours might be.

You have a role to play in God's story. You have a role to play in God's upper story of love and salvation.

You're part of that. Let's look at what the Bible says about Jeremiah's call, conveniently found in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 1, verses 9 and 10.

Let's read this together. Jeremiah 1, verses 10 and 10.

He said he was too young. He said he wasn't a good speaker. Sounds a bit like Moses, doesn't it?

[17 : 24] But God promises Jeremiah that he will help him to speak and that he will be with him. Are you quick to disqualify yourself?

I can be. Are you quick to see some flawed kind of common sense that you've put together to explain how, oh, how can God possibly use me?

Or how could God need or even want to use you? I want to challenge you this morning. Have you ever heard of false humility?

Feels like an oxymoron. I believe that at times we falsely dismiss compliments and recognition. Not because we don't feel we deserve them.

We're prideful folks. We like it. But that we falsely dismiss them because we actually want more. And usually for purely selfish reasons.

[18 : 32] Does that make sense? Do you ever hear someone or yourself perhaps say, no, no, please, please, when we're actually meaning more, more, please, please? False humility.

God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us fulfill whatever he's called us to do. Just as he did with Jeremiah.

And in Matthew 29, 18 to 20, Jesus promised he would be with us to the end of the age. Not our age.

God's age. To the very end, God is with us. Emmanuel. I was struggling recently and I recognized that I was second-guessing something that I had already recognized was a conviction God had planted deep in my heart.

And Michelle looked at me as I struggled over this. Because I struggle out loud. It's kind of annoying probably. She looked at me and she said, you believe that was from God, right?

[19 : 47] She's very decisive. I somewhat bashfully agreed, yeah, I think so. Yeah, I believe it was. And then she did something really, really underhanded.

Especially to do to your husband and a pastor. I thought it was really nasty. She quoted scripture to me. She said the words of Proverbs, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

You said, I can't. In all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight. In my indecision, while I recognized the clear message, I was definitely hearing from God.

And his gifting of discernment in me. I was stuck in a rut. I was trying to run it back and forth over and over through my own filters.

Back to Jeremiah. Jeremiah. His task was to call God's people back to him. But he would ultimately fail. He would weep over Judah's destruction while also offering hope for the future.

[21 : 10] Jeremiah's agony over the fate of the kingdom of Judah is recorded in the book of Lamentations. But so is his hope. The Bible says in Lamentations 3, 21 to 23.

Let's read this together. Yet this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed.

For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Oh God, my Father.

Friends, remember. We all, each of you, have a role to play in God's story. And he calls us.

He is calling you. God will walk with us and sustain us. Whatever he has called us to do. And even when times are hard, and it feels like we have failed, sometimes again, our great God is always faithful, and he will be there to pick you up again.

[22 : 32] Without question, God's faithfulness is seen in the fact that he sent his son Jesus to bridge the gap created by sin.

Our sin. And it's only through Jesus that we're restored into a right relationship with God. As we celebrate communion together this morning, we recognize that Jesus alone is the answer in our lives.

And that only through his sacrifice can we find true forgiveness and rescue from our cycle of sin. This morning, we approach this table together, not, as I've said before, as a Bramard Baptist Church table, but as the Lord's table, which he calls us to freely come.

The Bible tells us that we need to take a good, long look at what's going on in our hearts when we partake in the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11, 28, the Apostle Paul wrote, let a person examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

In Corinth, this intended act of communion with the Lord had become thoughtless and even selfish as a church ritual.

[24 : 04] They'd lost focus on what it meant. They'd lost focus, even in the early church, when it was so close to the reality of what had happened.

They lost focus. Their minds had shifted from Christ's substitutionary sacrifice for them and had wandered elsewhere.

We must not let that happen to us. For years, for years, I sat where you are, taking communion, not necessarily thinking about it that completely, that thoroughly, checking a once-a-month Sunday box.

Let's not do that. I challenge you to stay mentally engaged as you partake of these elements. Let God speak into your heart.

Let God comfort you. Let God convict you. Receive His grace. 1 Peter 1, 18 and 19 reminds us that what is happening here has been ordained to soberly remind us of the high cost of God's forgiveness.

[25 : 28] Eating and drinking of these elements together vividly depicts our union and solidarity, not only with one another, but with Christ as our Lord, our Savior, our source of spiritual life.

our hope. We should also take this time to examine ourselves to ensure that our relationship with Christ is authentic and genuine.

So as you reflect, think about the beginning of your relationship with Christ. Not only that, but also seek to discover if there's any unconfessed sin that's getting in the way of your current fellowship with God.

And lastly, it would be wrong for us to eat the bread and drink the cup of Christ without a heart that is purposely, I'm going to use my buzzword for the year, intentionally thankful.

The Lord's Supper is not only a reminder of His brutal death, but it's also a celebration of the incredibly generous grace of God and the invaluable privilege of being forgiven.

[26 : 51] So as you take the bread and cup this morning, do it with a grateful heart that can say along with generations of Christians, thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift.

perfect. I'll be serving communion this morning and would invite you to come forward as the music plays. And as always, if you're sitting with someone who's not able to come, please bring the elements back to them when you return to your seat.

And please wait to eat and drink and we'll do that together. Thank you.