

"Wages of Sin"

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[0 : 00] What do we do with the darkness of a sinful and fallen world?! It's often said today that we live in unprecedented times.

! The perception is that the rising tide is that of darkness and that the world is getting worse. We feel political instability. We feel economic stress. We look around the world and we see war and famine and suffering.

And here in the U.S. we have a sense that our society is growing meaner, more divided, more stressed. Now, I don't know if this is true. I've lived long enough, and some of you have lived longer than me, to know that the world has ups and downs.

In the 70s, there was an economic downturn and potential of nuclear war with Russia. In 2001, there was 9-11, and it felt like the world was an unsafe place.

In 2008, we had an economic crisis. In 2020, we had a global pandemic. So, we've certainly not necessarily gotten into something new and different. Maybe its forms are a little different, but certainly the tide continues to come in and out.

[1 : 19] But the darkness still seems to be there. And we don't like that because we want things to be getting better. We have this hope that there is... that we live in a world that there is progress, that the trajectory is better and better.

But careful view of history might say that this is not necessarily true. Certainly, we have gotten better. I'm really thankful for indoor plumbing, refrigeration, and antibiotics. You know, these are great progresses that didn't exist years ago.

But the world has continued in darkness. Humans continue to be selfish. They continue to start wars and to hurt one another.

They continue to fight for their own goodness and gain. And friends, it's not just in the world that we live in we feel this, but in the community of the church as well.

We feel these ebbs and flows. At one level, the church is bigger and more global than it's ever been. The church has advanced in all sorts of places, and the gospel is being heard across the world.

[2 : 29] And yet we also see the worst of the church, don't we? Sexual abuse, financial misconduct, doctrinal compromise.

How much we feel at times like the church broadly is the proverbial frog in the kettle, becoming more and more like our culture rather than being distinctive as God's people.

So, how do we manage this? How do we think about living with God in light of this? Well, I believe that our passage today will address this. We're in 2 Chronicles. We'll be in chapter 21 and a little bit in 22 as we look at the stories of the next kings.

And as you turn there, if you want to turn there in your Bible, it's page 347, 2 Chronicles 21. But remember the context that Chronicles was written not during the time of the kings of Israel, but after it, right?

After, in fact, the exile of Israel when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken away, and then the return from exile. And Chronicles was written to those people who had come back, and they knew about God's judgment on the sin of Israel in the exile.

[3 : 56] God had seen that His people had forsaken Him. They had not trusted Him politically. They had not worshipped Him as He called them to.

They did not. They worshipped other gods instead, and they failed to show the kingdom ethic that God had called them to live. And for all these reasons, God said, enough, I'm going to send you into exile.

And yet He brought them back, and now the people then are wondering, what now? Now we live in a world that seems much less glorious than the kingdom before.

We're not a kingdom now. We're a vassal state of Persia. We don't have a king on a throne. We are led by rulers and priests, but we don't have independence.

How can they be God's kingdom in that world? How can they live as God's people in the face of such disappointment and such uncertainty?

[4 : 54] The Chronicle writes in the chapters we're going to look at today about a time of great darkness in the kingdom before the exile.

And He gives answers to that post-exilic community and to us as how we live. So let's pray together and ask God for help as we look at His Word this morning.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank You for this morning. We thank You for Your Word. And Lord, we thank You that Your Spirit, Your Spirit that has inspired this Word to be written down, that has preserved Your Word through the centuries, that Lord, now Your Spirit that now illumines Your Word, makes it clear to us so that we might understand it.

Lord, we pray for Your help this morning. I pray that I might speak clearly. I pray that Your Word would speak to us by Your Spirit. And Lord, that You would turn our hearts to You again this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So as we read this story, it's not a particularly uplifting one. We're going to look at three things.

[6 : 05] We will see the darkness of sin, the consequences of sin, and then the remedy for sin. So there's your outline if you're an outline taker, the darkness of sin, the consequences of sin, and the remedy of sin.

And rather than reading through the whole story at once, I'm going to read it in chunks as we go through it. So first, we're going to look at the first six verses and also verse 11 of chapter 21.

Let's read those together. This is the story of Jehoram. So this is what God's Word says. 2 Chronicles 21, verse 1.

All these were the sons of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah.

Their father gave them great gifts of silver and gold and valuable possessions together with fortified cities in Judah. But he gave the kingdom to Jehoram because he was the firstborn.

[7 : 15] When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword and also some of the princes of Israel. Jehoram was 32 years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.

And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

And then skipping down to verse 11. Moreover, he made high places in the hill country of Judah and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom and made Judah go astray.

Well, here's a king that we're not going to try to emulate, are we? The sins of Jehoram were clear from the very start.

As he ascended to the throne as one of the many sons of his father Jehoshaphat, he was given the special task of being the king over the whole nation of Israel.

[8 : 29] Now, remember, historically, there's the southern nation and the northern nation. And the southern nation is sometimes called Judah, and sometimes it's called Israel. The northern part is always called Israel, and we have to figure out when Israel means the northern kingdom and when it means everybody.

But, so he was the king over in Jerusalem ruling over it. And he looked at his brothers, the ones that God had blessed through his father with riches and wealth and fortified cities.

There was seemingly a sense of God's presence with them or blessing on them. And he saw them only as rivals. And following in the footsteps of the world around him, in insecurity and fear, he murdered them.

He wiped them all out. And though this tactic never seems to work throughout history, killing off all your rivals seems to be a common theme of those who are insecure and those who are fearful when they take the throne.

And not only did he do that, but what we read in verse 11, he also forsook the true worship of God. He rebuilt the high places.

[9 : 43] Now, in Canaanite religion, the high places were places where people would go up, literally up mountains, hills, whatever, to find places of worship, to worship the Canaanite gods who lived in the area.

Israel was surrounded by people that worshipped pantheons of gods. But God had called Israel to be unique. Remember the first commandment that God gave to Moses.

You shall have no other gods before me. And yet here is the king of God's people building places to worship other gods.

Why would he do this? Well, the story goes on and it says, because he walked in the ways of the house of Ahab. Now, if you've been here, you're starting to pick up on this.

The northern kingdom during this time was ruled by a guy named Ahab, who was the worst of the worst. In all ways. And Jehoram's father, in an attempt to make peace with this unrighteous ruler, said, let's make an alliance and let me marry my son to your daughter.

[10 : 55] So Jehoram's wife was the daughter of Ahab. So they were covenanted together in marriage in a unique way.

And do you know what Jehoram did? He followed his wife in worshiping her gods. For her mother was Jezebel, who worshipped Baal. And so through this, all of the Canaanite worship, all of the worship of other gods in the area were brought in.

Now, the rite of Chronicles contrasts the house of David, that which is, though imperfectly, faithful in worship, trusting in politics, obedient to God's law, with the house of Ahab, idolatrous, unfaithful, self-reliant, disobedient.

Verse 11 says, he led them into a whoredom. Why does he use this word? Well, because the whole covenant relationship between God and his people was viewed through one lens as like a marriage. It was a covenant between two people committed wholly to one another. And yet Jehoram broke that covenant by going to worship these other gods.

[12 : 15] And you know, you should know, if you don't know this, the Old Testament picks up this theme over and over again, how adultery is... language is used for the unfaithful worship or turning to worship other gods, the idolatry of the people of God.

And so Jehoram violated the marriage of God and his people, and the betrayal was profound. He was like a man who would bring home prostitutes into his own home and parade them in front of his wife and family.

In this era of Judah, the sin was great. And any righteous person would ask, how do we live in such times? Now, before we go on and continue to answer that question, we need to think about the question, how do we learn from this account?

Because our instinct often in the first hand is to look at this and to say, Jehoram was terrible. He was the worst. I can't believe that anyone would do something like that.

But friends, this is not how we are to read our Bible. Because we are reminded again and again by the Bible that, but for the grace of God, our hearts have the same seed of sin in it that was in Jehoram.

[13 : 40] And we would follow in his footsteps apart from God's grace. Okay, so let me explore that a little. Really? I haven't murdered anyone today.

Have you? I haven't wiped out, you know, gone in and gone postal and shot up my co-workers today. Is that really what you mean?

No, I don't think so. But let me ask you this. Has your heart felt the same fear and the same insecurity and the same threat for your position?

Have you ever felt jealous of your sibling who seems to get preferential treatment from your parents? Have you ever felt jealous?

Or have you ever criticized with your words one of your spouse's colleagues because they're so dang impressive that you feel insecure around them?

[14 : 40] So you have to find the thing that you can critique and try to tear them down with your words. Have you ever felt so jealous of the person in your department who is doing so well that you feel the need to speak of their weaknesses and their failures to make yourself look better before others?

Remember the words of Jesus. You've heard it said, that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. This is in Matthew 5, 21, in the Sermon on the Mount.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. And whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

You see, friends, we may not murder our rivals to the throne that we sit on, but how often do we use our words out of our fear and insecurity to attack others, to build ourselves up?

Okay. And maybe you're so good, you don't do that either. And you think, I don't bow down to idols. [15:57] I don't have any temples in my house. I don't go up to high places to worship God. Tim Keller says that an idol, this is in the book Counterfeit Gods, an idol is anything more important to you than God.

Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give, you seek to give you what only God can give.

Things that we love more than God. And friends, we need to be aware that we might make idols out of bad things. So we become alcoholics or we go on, we're unfaithful sexually, or, you know, we could think about those kinds of idols easily.

But what about the idols of the good things in our lives that we make ultimate? Right? When patriotism becomes fanaticism, when career success becomes workaholism, when financial stability becomes greed, when romantic love becomes lust, and when we make these things our idols, they twist us, and they twist the way that we live and how we relate to others, and most importantly, how we relate to God.

Because we have made them the functional God to whom we look for salvation, for justifying our lives, for meaning and purpose, for ultimate security.

[17:32] The things that we ought to get from God alone, we get from these things. So, friends, we need to recognize that Jehoram is not so different than us, that our hearts are prone to wander in similar ways, and that the darkness of sin is right there in our own hearts as well as in the hearts of others.

The passage goes on, and it talks about not only that sin is dark, but that it has consequences. So, as we keep moving on, the consequences of sin, we're going to look at verses 8 through 10, and then 12 through 20.

So, let's read this together. In his days, that is the days of Jehoram, in his days, Edom revolted from the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own.

Then Jehoram passed over with his commanders and all his chariots, and he rose by night and struck the Edomites who had surrounded him and his chariot commanders. So, Edom revolted from the rule of Judah to this day.

At that time, Libna also revolted from his rule because he had forsaken the Lord, the God of his fathers. And skipping down to verse 12.

[18:56] And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father or in the ways of Asa, the king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel and have enticed Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom as the house of Ahab led Israel into whoredom.

And also you have killed your brothers of your father's house who were better than yourself.

Behold, the Lord will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions.

And you yourself will have a severe sickness with the disease of your bowels until your bowels come out because of the disease day by day. And the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and the Arabians who were near the Ethiopians.

And they came up against Judah and invaded it and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house and also his sons and his wives so that no son was left to him except Jehoaz, his youngest son.

And after all this, the Lord struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease. In the course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease and he died in great agony.

[20:20] The people made no fire in his honor like the fires made for his fathers. He was 32 years old when he began to reign and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem and he departed with no one's regret.

They buried him in the city of David, not in the tombs of the kings. So what does, what happens to Jehoram?

What are the consequences of sin that come? We see this expressed in two different ways. The story tells about God's judgment, the consequences of sin in two different ways.

One is a passive voice where he describes things in such a way that let the reader understand this is a condemnation of what has happened. And then there are times when the writer says explicitly, this is what God did.

So passively, the chronicler says, there are a number of results from Jehoram's sin. One is, he's starting to lose his kingdom. Edom was a conquered territory and they revolted against him.

[21 : 27] Libna was a town that was given to the priesthood within the confines of Israel and this town also revolted. So both peoples outside that had been brought in, but also cities within Judah were starting to rebel against him.

And one of the things you see throughout Chronicles is that the writer is saying, when the king follows the Lord, the Lord honors him by protecting the land and expanding the kingdom.

And when he doesn't, there is conflict, there is strife, there is military loss, there's political loss because of it. We see in verses 16 and 17 that the Philistines and the Arabians, so there are multiple levels of this rebellion and attack against him, and that Jehoram's foes are triumphant. They win. They pillage the land. They take away all the wealth that Jehoram had gained, or that Jehoshaphat had gained a generation before. They took it all away.

And so his poverty, politically, economically, were all a result of his sin. And when you read verse 20, nobody laughed.

[22 : 51] I thought someone would laugh. To no one's regret did he die. No one missed this guy after he was gone. Other kings are honored.

They're given funeral pyres. They are buried with David and the forefathers in a place of honor. Jehoram got none of this. It is an implicit condemnation on his whole reign.

And in this way, the chronicler is communicating this is God's judgment on this man because of his sin. But the chronicler also says that God is even more direct and active to it.

Right? He stirs up Elijah, and Elijah doesn't show up anywhere else in Chronicles. If you go back to Kings, he has like 12 chapters. But this is the only time he shows up and he writes a letter and he speaks God's Word directly to Jehoram.

And what does he say? Because you have done this, because you have sinned in this way, because you have walked in the house of Ahab, because you have gone in this direction, the Lord will do these things.

[24 : 08] And then we see in verse 16, the Lord stirred up the anger of the Philistines and caused them to come in and attack Judah.

And in verse 18, the Lord struck Jehoram with a disease, an incurable disease, because he walked not in the ways of his forefathers who were faithful to God, who trusted God, who worshipped God the way he was meant to, but he walked in the ways of Ahab, the ways of rebellion, of independence, of self-reliance, of evil.

We see it even in chapter 22. Just so you know, this is the beginning of this next chapter is even worse. His son Ahaziah is worse than he is, and he only lives for a year, and then God kills him, and then his wife takes the throne for six years, and she's the worst of them all.

She destroys her offspring and anyone who might be a rival to her throne. And it says in verse 7 of chapter 22, it was ordained by God that the downfall of Ahaziah should come through, and then there's a bit of a story that I'm not going to get into, and it says, God raised up a man named Jehu whom the Lord had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab.

God was actively working to combat this evil. God will not allow the unrighteousness to stand or the sin to continue.

[25 : 45] His righteousness requires a response. Now, how do we apply this to our lives? We need to be very careful here because there is evidence, certainly in the book of Acts, we see people like Ananias and Sapphira who lie to the apostles and reap an immediate and clear judgment from God.

There are also others who seem to bear the consequences of their sin in different ways. But we must be so careful as we think of this because it is clear that not every sickness is God's active response of judgment.

It is clear that not every loss, every thwarted plan, every opposition we experience is God's active judgment to us. Some of you may be prone to think that every trial and every sickness is God's judgment and you're thinking, how did I, what did I do to deserve this?

How did I cause God to bring this into my life? And you need to be careful because that's not the proper way to read this. Right? Now, some of you are on the opposite end of the spectrum and you don't see God's hand in any of it.

And when things go bad, you think, gosh, I don't know where that came from. Couldn't, you know, that's unfortunate and just move on with life. Christians are called to be self-reflective people.

[27 : 20] The gospel is one of continual confession of sin and repentance. This is what 1 John reminds us. Right? If we say we have no sin, we lie and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So, when things like this happen, when things happen in our lives, here's, or when we see them happening in the others, here's what I want to, here's my counsel to you.

One, be very careful not to pronounce judgment on someone else. Just because John Hinkson got sick doesn't mean that he sinned and God is punishing him for it.

I can't know God's word or God's will that clearly. I don't have the power to pronounce that kind of judgment on what happens to him. Okay?

So, I want to be incredibly, I don't ever want to say, I know what's going on with this. But when it happens to me, I want to ask myself, have I sinned?

[28 : 25] Lord, are you trying to show me an idol in my life that I don't recognize? Have I been harboring a hidden jealousy that's coloring my words?

Are there motives of my heart that I'm not even necessarily consciously aware of that you are revealing through this trial or through this sickness? Is there a blind spot in my life where I can't see my sin?

Because here's the thing. When God brought these things to Jehoram, right, up to the point where he killed him, right, there was always a warning and an invitation, right?

The warning was, you are doing wrong. Don't do this. The invitation was, implicitly, repent. Turn away from this sin. Turn back to the Lord.

And we've seen kings fail and then succeed. And we've seen them succeed and then fail. There's always the invitation of the Lord while we have breath to heed the warning and to repent of our sin and to turn to Him again.

[29 : 35] And so we need to hear that and to recognize that continuing to barrel along, cherishing sin, defending sin, justifying sin, we put ourselves under the judgment of God.

the Lord. The Chronicle writes this, but the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to Him and to His sons forever.

God's plan cannot be thwarted by the sinfulness and fallenness of human beings. Jehoram's failure could not stop God's covenantal faithfulness.

He remembered the line of David, of Solomon, of the descendants through Jehoshaphat, through Jehoram. He remembered him through this line all the way through, and He was faithful to it.

And He knew that He had made a promise that one day a descendant of David would sit on an eternal throne and rule over an eternal kingdom where He would bring the fullness of His righteousness, and that God was so committed to being true to His Word and to this promise that even the greatest darkness couldn't stop that from happening.

[31 : 17] If you look in chapter 22, during the reign of Jehoram's wife, Athaliah, when she tries to wipe out any descendants of Jehoram, God intervened, and God saved one of the descendants of Jehoram.

And we'll see that next week as we look in the life of Joash and how God raises him up to be a righteous king in response to all of these things. Think about the people after the exile hearing this story.

They don't have a throne to sit on. It's not like the house of David had been wiped out, but there was no king. There was no kingly line left after this.

They were grasping and they were thinking, God, where are you? This Word speaks to God's faithfulness to those people. I have not forgotten my covenant.

I have not forsaken my people. Follow me. Walk with me. Walk in the ways of righteousness. And I will continue to do this.

[32 : 28] And even if you fail, even if you disobey, even if you abandon me, I will forsake you this generation, but I will not forsake my plans. I will bring judgment on you this generation, but I will not give up my redemptive plan for the world.

And we know this because when we open the pages of the New Testament, we start with Matthew writing of Jesus, the son of David.

That there was a baby born in the city of David who would grow up to establish a kingdom that would have no end. And he would come and proclaim a kingdom is at hand.

And he would establish himself as the true light, the lamp that God had promised for David and for his people.

You see, God hadn't forgotten his promise or his plan, but he continued to work it and he found its fullness in the person of Jesus.

[33 : 40] And so, when we come to the end of the Bible and we look at Revelation chapter 5, we hear these words. Remember, this is a scene in the throne room of God and the people are saying, who can open the scrolls and bring... who has the right to bring judgment onto the world, to bring redemption to the world?

Who could ever do these things? No one is worthy. And in chapter 5, verse 5 of Revelation, it says this, And one of the elders said to me, Weep no more.

Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

And skipping down to verse 9, it says, And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals. For you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

And you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God and they shall reign on the earth.

Friends, this is what God has done and this is what God is doing.

[34 : 54] He has sent Jesus and through his life and his death and his resurrection, he has finally and fully accomplished the redemption of his people and he is now applying it in this world and the proclamation of the gospel and the glorifying of Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of what God is doing in this dark age, in this dark day, in this dark heart of mine.

Bringing his redemptive purposes to call a people out of darkness and into the glorious kingdom of his Son. This is what God is doing in the world.

And this is our hope. This is our confidence. When we read the news reports and we think it's unprecedentedly bad, we go back to God's Word and He is unquestionably faithful.

When we think of our own sin and we think I am irredeemably evil, God looks at us and says, my Son has died for the redemption of you and the forgiveness of your sins.

This is what God is doing in the world and He will not surrender it. And friends, the church may fail in places and at times and God will bring judgment on the church and let it atrophy and die, but the church writ large, the church of Jesus Christ will never fail.

[36 : 25] The gates of hell will not stand against it. And at the end of the day, we will join that throng worshipping around the throne of Jesus forever as His kingdom of priests, as His people.

And we will reign with Him over the whole world and the fulfillment of all the hopes of the people in Israel during Jehoram's time, of the people in the post-exilic time wondering what happened, of the people in Jesus' time who wondered, God, where are you and how are you at work?

And us today, this is our confidence. God will not forsake us. He has made a remedy for sin and He is calling us to hear the warning to forsake sin and to hear the invitation to come to the Redeemer and the King of the world.

Let's pray. Amen. Lord, we want Your Spirit to work in our hearts.

Lord, we pray that You would comfort those of us who feel defeated and weighed down and burdened and overwhelmed by our sin and by the darkness of the world.

[37 : 46] Comfort us with this Word. Lord, we want You to warn us if we are cavalierly and callously and willfully or even uncaringly, Lord, embracing sin, idolatry, unfaithfulness.

Oh, Lord, search our hearts. Show us if there is any wicked way in us and draw us back, Lord, to the good news of the Gospel that in Christ we are forgiven of our sins and made new so that we might live as followers of You as Your people in this world.

Thank You, Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.